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NATHANIEL DEUTSCH

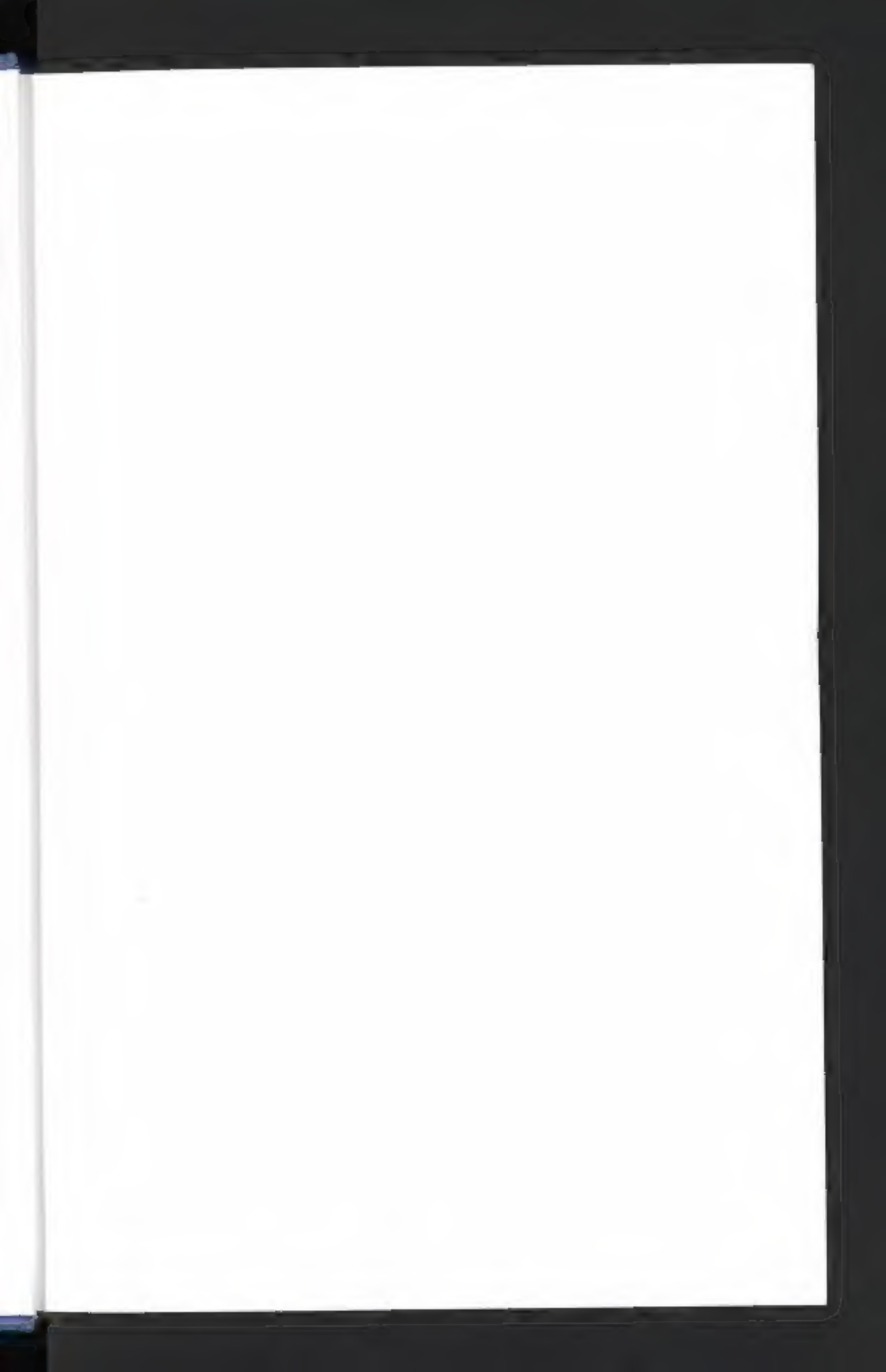
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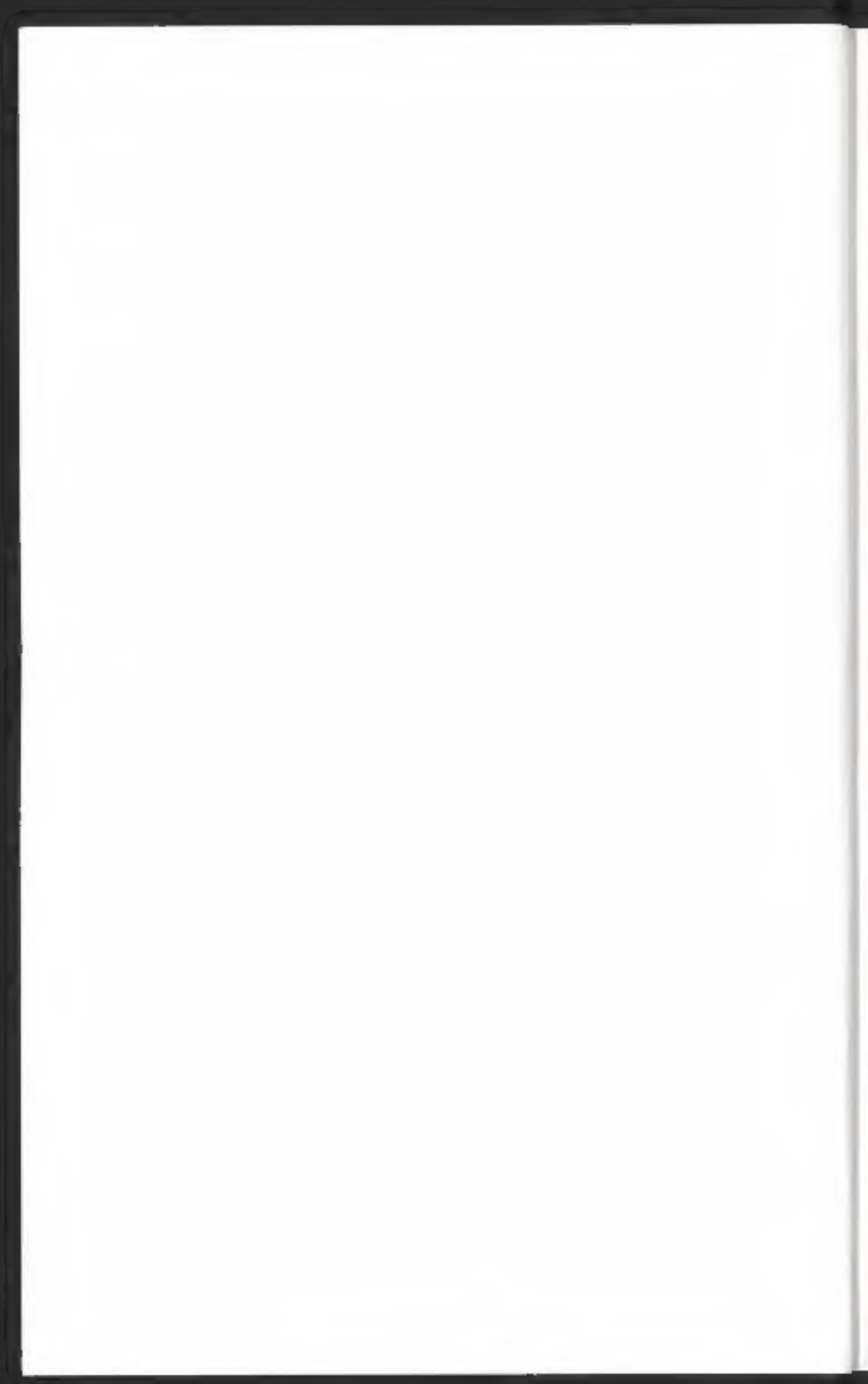
ANGELIC VICE-REGENCY IN LATE ANTIQUITY





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GUARDIANS OF THE GATE

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GUARDIANS OF THE GATE

ANGELIC VICE REGENCY IN LATE ANTIQUITY

BY

NATHANIEL DEUTSCH



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For Yael and David



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PREFACE

This book reflects a long period of research into the religious movements of Late Antiquity. Out of this same research emerged my first book *The Gnostic Imagination: Gnosticism, Mandaeism, and Merkabah Mysticism* which focused on the theoretical issues involved in a comparison of these traditions and touched on a number of theological issues, such as the link between the hypostatic body of God and transformative knowledge. The present study may be read as a companion volume to *The Gnostic Imagination* insofar as it examines the same religious movements. Whereas the first book explored methodologies and broadly examined Merkabah mysticism, Gnosticism, and Mandaeism, the present work takes a magnifying glass to a single topic within these traditions: the myth of the angelic vase regent.



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

"Truth did not come into the world naked, but it came in types and images"
Gospel of Philip 67-10

One of the most important types to mediate between the divine realm and the material world in late antique religions was the angelic vice regent. As the name implies, the angelic vice regent functioned as a theological counterpart to the political vice regent. Just as the human vice regent mediated between the emperor and his realm, so the angelic vice regent mediated between God and the world. Thus, the angelic vice regent frequently functioned as judge and governor of the world, guardian of the divine dwelling, priest of the heavenly tabernacle, and even as a divine hypostasis and demiurgic figure.

More than any other figure in late antique religions the angelic vice regent embodies the logic of mediation. Certainly the angelic vice regent was not the sole mediator figure in late antique religions. For he was the mediator *par excellence*. The angelic vice regent mediated between the physical and pneumatic worlds, divine and human existence, transcendence and immanence. The mediating functions of the angelic vice regent reveal his quintessentially mythical character, as Lévi-Strauss has written: "myths seem to be entirely devoted to exhausting all the possible solutions to the problem of bridging the gap between the *two* and the *one*."

This book will illuminate a highly important topic within the history of angels. Angels have fascinated human beings for thousands of years and continue to do so today, as the current host of books on angels attests. The important position of the angelic vice regent in the theologies and cosmologies of Late Antiquity teaches us much about what it meant to be divine or human in this period. Thus, the angelic vice regent holds at least one key to understanding the basic theological and anthropological structures of Late Antiquity.

Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, Vol. I, New York and London, 1963, p. 226.

I will examine a number of angelic vice regents including the Jewish figures Metatron and Akatriel, the Gnostic figure Sabaoth and the Mandaean figure Abathur. The role of the angelic vice regent in early Christianity requires a monograph of its own. Because of this I have merely outlined the profile of Jesus as a vice regent, as well as certain Muslim and Hermetic traditions, in appendices. The comparative study of angelic vice regents in Merkabah mysticism, Gnosticism and Mandaeism is important for several reasons. The development of highly similar angelic vice regent traditions within Merkabah mysticism, Gnosticism, and Mandaeism indicates that all three movements struggled with the same theological questions and sometimes attempted to solve these questions in parallel ways. By contrast, the differences between Jewish, Gnostic and Mandaean angelic vice regents highlights the sometimes conflicting orientations of these religious traditions. My comparative examination will reveal that Jewish, Gnostic, and Mandaean sources drew on a common pool of biblical and intertestamental Jewish traditions in constructing the myths of their respective angelic vice regent figures.

A number of scholars, most notably Gershom Scholem, have examined the relationship between Merkabah mysticism and Gnosticism. In another study I examined this topic in detail placing particular focus on Scholem's work.¹ Although Merkabah mysticism is not a form of Gnosticism, as Scholem would sometimes have had it, there are a number of important elements shared by the two movements. These include common cosmological and angelological motifs, a belief in transformative knowledge, and a valorization of the image of God.

Studies on the relationship between Mandaeism and Judaism have long focused on the areas of ethics and ritual.² While cosmological and theological issues have attracted some attention, many important topics remain unexplored. Of particular interest are the many parallels between Mandaeism and different forms of Jewish mysticism including the Kabbalah and the Hekhalot material.³

¹ Although not all of these figures are angels, per se, their character justifies this convenient appellation.

² Nathaniel Deutsch, *The Gnostic Imagination: Gnosticism, Mandaeism, and Merkabah Mysticism* (Leiden, 1995).

³ See especially Kurt Rudolph, *Die Mandäer I: Prolegomena. Das Mandäerproblem* (Göttingen, 1961); *Die Mandäer II: Die Apokalypse* (Göttingen, 1961); and Edwin Yamauchi, *Gnostic Ethics and Mandaean Origins* (Cambridge, 1970), for two different opinions on the issue of Jewish-Mandaean relations.

⁴ One scholar who noted the importance of such parallels was Hugo Odeberg.

Despite the inherent difficulties in comparatively examining Jewish and Mandaean literature there are several advantages to such a study. First of all, Jews and Mandaeans lived in close proximity in Babylonia. According to their own accounts, the Mandaeans were settled in the same area as the Jews, even living in the two major centers of Jewish learning, Sura and Pumbedita.¹ In addition to their geographical closeness, there are other indications that Jews and Mandaeans had close contact. Throughout Mandaean literature we find strong anti-Jewish polemics, a phenomenon which would imply some first hand knowledge of Judaism at the very least, and, perhaps, an actual competition between Mandaeanism and Judaism. The severity of anti-Jewish polemics in the Mandaean literature has even provoked Kurt Rudolph to theorize the existence of 'periodic oppressions by Babylonian Jews'.²

Their geographical closeness, the anti-Jewish polemics and the mutually comprehensible dialects of Aramaic spoken by the two groups makes it very likely that Mandaeans and Jews influenced one another, as Alexander has written: 'The Mandaeans were for several centuries, in close historical contact with the rabbinic communities of Babylonia in which Merkabah mysticism flourished'.³ On the linguistic closeness between Mandaic and the Aramaic spoken by the Jews of Babylonia, Theodor Nöldeke, one of the nineteenth century pioneers in Mandaean research, wrote:

Mandaean is closely related to the ordinary dialect of the Babylonian Talmud. Both the dialects are neighbours geographically speaking — actually we may assume that the language of the Babylonian Talmud was that used in Upper and Mandaean that used in Lower Babylonia.⁴

See H. Odeberg, *3 Enoch or The Hebrew Book of Enoch* (New York, 1973) reprint, pp. 64–7. In his 'Preface' (reprinted in Odeberg's edition of *3 Enoch*, p. xxxix) Julius Greenfield sharply criticizes such parallels as 'almost verbal' and are on the whole meaningless. While Greenfield correctly characterizes many of the parallels proposed by Odeberg, he is too broad in his criticism. In several instances, Odeberg illuminated valid comparative issues by juxtaposing parallel passages from Mandaean literature and *3 Enoch*. I will revisit some of these parallels in my section on the Mandaean vice-regent figure Abathur.

¹ E. S. Drower, *The Haran Gnostics and the Baptism of Hibil-Zimm* (Vaticano, 1953) p. 10.

² K. Rudolph, in Werner Foerster, ed., *Gnosis: A Selection of Gnostic Texts*, Vol. II (1974), p. 142.

³ P. S. Alexander, '3 Hebrew Apocalypse of Enoch', in James Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. I (New York, 1983) p. 253.

⁴ Nöldeke, *Mandaic Grammar*, Halle, 89, pp. xvi^f, as cited by E. S. Drower in *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran: Their Customs, Magic, Legends, and Folklore* (Leiden, 1962) (reprint), p. 13.

There is also evidence in the form of magic bowls, that Mandaeans and Jews shared common magical and angelological beliefs. Besides these indications of contact, there is the complex question of whether Mandaeanism developed out of Palestinian Jewish roots and the debate over the extent of Jewish elements in Mandaeanism. Perhaps Scholem was correct in his intuition that Judaism and Mandaeanism were more closely intertwined than generally thought.

Christian Gnosticism in Babylonia too seems to have been preceded by a form of Jewish Gnosticism, one which in this case assimilated Jewish and Persian elements and intertwined the one with the other. Indeed, I think it can be shown by a closer study of the much discussed Mandaean texts (in which the Jewish elements are much stronger than generally supposed) that such a process may well have taken place."

Throughout this volume I will point out parallels between Mandaean and Jewish material, primarily from Merkabah mysticism but in a few cases from the Kabbalah as well. In a few places I will suggest that certain Mandaean and Jewish sources may have a poetical relationship with one another. Although scholars have been intrigued by the question of the relationship between Mandaeanism and Judaism since the nineteenth century, most studies have focused on the issue of origins and specifically on whether Mandaeanism developed out of Judaism. In a few cases parallels between Mandaean and Jewish traditions have been noted and analyzed but the field remains in its infancy. Particularly interesting are the tantalizing parallels between Mandaeanism and Jewish mysticism.

In the past few years Mandaean studies has become re-energized thanks to the prodigious efforts of Jorunn Jacobsen Buckley. I seek to make a small contribution to what will hopefully be a renaissance of interest in this often neglected area of study. My own suggestions are only that—suggestions. Many of the parallels and potential poetics which I will identify in the following pages remain on the level of speculation. Rather than stifle my own imagination and the imaginations of others, I have chosen to include such speculative discussion. Even if some of my suggestions prove to be incorrect, I hope that they will nevertheless help to inspire further research into the relationship of Mandaeanism and Judaism. This question is not only intriguing to scholars. As a Mandaean goldsmith who worked with

¹ Gershom Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition*, New York, 1965, p. 5.

Hasidim in New York's diamond district recently told J. J. Buckley "We [Mandaeans and Hasidim] are so similar! The same clothes, the same habits, the same humor — everything I was amazed. Are they Mandaeans? Are we Jews?"

Mediation in Late Antiquity

The role of mediating figures in early Judaism has provoked great debate. Many Christian scholars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries adopted the position that the need for intermediaries in early Jewish theology differentiated it from Christianity. Ferdinand Weber contrasted the immanent theology of Christian trinitarianism with the "transcendentism" of ancient Judaism. Weber argued that Judaism must have postulated a transcendent God, since it clearly formulated a number of intermediaries between him and the world. In a scathing review, George Foot Moore criticized Weber for his ignorance of the "history or the content of Christian dogma," which for centuries had emphasized the parallels between the Supreme God of Christianity and that of Judaism, and also between the Christian Logos or Son and Jewish intermediary figures.

Like Welser, Wilhelm Bousset contrasted what he considered to be the immanent theology of Christianity and the transcendent theology of Judaism.¹ Bousset relied heavily on apocalyptic sources for his description of Jewish theology, for which he was roundly criticized by Jewish scholars, who lamented his lack of rabbinic evidence. Although Moore, too, cautioned against painting an accurate portrait of early Jewish theology from the apocalypses alone, his primary criticism of Bousset was more subtle: even the God of the apocalypses was not transcendent; rather, the apocalyptic image of a

¹ J. Buckley, "Mandaeans in the USA Today: The Tenacity of Tradition," *ARAM* 7, 1995, p. 355.

² Ferdinand Weber, *System der altynagogen palästinischen Theologie*, Leipzig, 1890, esp. pp. 145ff.

³ G. F. Moore, "Christian Writers on Judaism," *Harvard Theological Review* 14 (1921), p. 233; idem, "Intermediaries in Jewish Theology: Memra, Shekhinah, Metatron," *Harvard Theological Review* 15, 1922. For a more recent review of the history of scholarship on early Jewish theology (one which draws heavily on the work of Moore and Büchler), cf. E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, Philadelphia, 1977.

⁴ Wilhelm Bousset, *Die Religion des Judentums im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter*, Berlin, 1903.

God enthroned in the highest heaven, surrounded by ministers of different ranks, and nearly inaccessible to mere mortals, was 'conditioned by the visionary form'.¹

Moore criticized both Christian dogmatists and scholars for writing with ulterior theological motives which inevitably skewed their conclusions. In his zeal to combat what he viewed as the pernicious anti-Jewish sentiment of Weber, Bousset, et al., Moore downplayed the significance of intermediate figures in early Jewish theology.² In retrospect, Moore's greatest contribution to the question of intermediaries in early Jewish theology was his identification and rejection of the polemical orientation of the scholarship which preceded him.

Moore's approach to the role of intermediate figures in early Judaism was challenged by several scholars of his own generation. The greatest critics of Moore's views on mediation were W. O. E. Oesterley³ and G. H. Box.⁴ While Oesterley and Box supported the existence of intermediaries in early Judaism, they did not accept the particular polemical stance of Bousset and Weber. Instead they came close to reiterating the earlier position of those Christian dogmatists who considered Jewish intermediaries to be an important parallel with Christian figures such as the Son or Logos. Box and Oesterley argued that while early Jewish theology was rich with intermediate figures, later Jewish theology became narrow and restricted.

The importance of the doctrines and thought-forms which have been passed in review above [concerning mediation] as differentiating the rise and growth of the expression of Christian ideas is now laid out and should be added that they largely belong to the wider and earlier Judaism which has had to give place to the narrower and more restricted Judaism of subsequent times.⁵

¹ Christian Writers on Judaism," p. 247.

² See, for example, "Intermediaries in Jewish Theology," p. 41.

³ W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Jewish Doctrine of Mediation* (London, 1903). Oesterley writes, p. 85: "We have so far seen that both the principle of Mediation as well as the idea of a Mediator are essentially formulated in the Rabbinical literature: men and angels, chief among the latter being the archangel, Michael, fulfil this function."

⁴ G. H. Box, "The Idea of Intermediation in Jewish Theology," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 73 (1923), 33. Also G. H. Box and W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Religion and Worship of the Synagogue: An Introduction to the Study of Judaism from the New Testament Period* (New York, 1907), pp. 64, 15. A more recent examination of this literature appears in A. M. Goldberg, *Untersuchungen über die Vorstellung vom der Schechina in der rabbinischen Literatur* (Studia Judaica 5), Berlin, 1969.

⁵ *The Religion and Worship of the Synagogue*, p. 195.

Oesterley and Box turned the view of Bousset and Weber on its head, replacing it with their own polemical model, which still viewed early Judaism through the lens of Christianity and found its theology wanting.

Within Jewish circles the issue of mediation has also been widely debated. While Saadya Ibn Ezra and Maimonides each developed their own doctrines of mediation, other traditional voices rejected the existence of intermediate figures or, at least, attempted to limit their scope and significance.³⁰ Among Jewish scholars of Moore's era, Joshua Abelson stands out for his opus *The Immanence of God in Rabbinical Judaism*.³¹ Abelson responded to those scholars who contrasted a transcendent God of Judaism with an immanent God of Christianity by stressing that in early Judaism, God was both transcendent and immanent, or as he put it "Immanence and Transcendence coalesce into one another component parts of the same whole."³² Abelson eliminated the theological necessity for intermediate figures in early Judaism by arguing that God was active in the world via manifestations such as the Shekinah or Ruah ha-Qodesh ("Holy Spirit").

Abelson's emphasis on the immanence of God in rabbinic literature was criticized by Ephraim Urbach as apologetic and exaggerated.³³ Nevertheless, like Abelson, Urbach stressed that the Shekinah was a "manifestation of the Lord" and not an hypostasis with a separate existence.³⁴ In support of this position, Urbach cited the work of Gershom Scholem. A close examination of Scholem's writings, however, reveals a more complex position than that suggested by Urbach. Although Scholem wrote that in the "Talmud, midrash, and the Aramaic translations of the Bible," the Shekinah was not a distinct hypostasis, he nevertheless described it as "verging on hypostatization."³⁵

³⁰ On this issue see Judah Goldin's article "Not by Means of an Angel and Not by Means of a Messenger" in Jacob Neusner, ed., *Religion in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough*, Leiden, 1968.

³¹ Joshua Abelson, *The Immanence of God in Rabbinical Judaism*, London, 1912; reprint, New York, 1969.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 37.

³³ Ephraim Urbach, *The Sages*, Jerusalem, 1975, p. 41.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 43, pp. 63-64.

³⁵ Although Urbach argued that Scholem's identification of *Midrash Proverbs* (ninth century) as the first textual source for a hypostatic Shekinah was too early, favoring instead the later work *Bereshit Rabbah* (eleventh century).

³⁶ Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, New York, 1991, pp. 147-148.

Furthermore, while Scholem basically accepted Abelson's assertion of the immanence of God in rabbinic literature, he unequivocally rejected its relevance for Merkabah mysticism. Instead, Scholem adopted the position of Heinrich Graetz that Merkabah mysticism was a "Judaized form of cosmocrational mysticism concerning the divine King or Emperor" or "Basileomorphism."¹ Far from a theology of immanence, Scholem argued that

in the Merkabah mysticism with which we are dealing here, the idea of God's immanence plays practically no part at all. The fact is that the true and spontaneous feeling of the Merkabah mystic knows nothing of divine immanence: the infinite gulf between the soul and God the King on His throne is not even bridged at the climax of mystical ecstasy.²

At the symbolic center of the unbreachable gulf between humans and God in Merkabah mysticism Scholem placed the figure of Metatron or the "lesser Jaho" who functioned as God's vice regent and angelic emissary.³

In the wake of Scholem's research, many scholars of early Jewish mysticism have focused on the issue of intermediate beings, generally concentrating on the figure of Metatron but also examining other figures, such as the angelic Jacob, the primal Adam, and the divinized Moses. Important contributions in this area have been made by Gedaliahu Stroumsa,⁴ Peter Schäfer,⁵ Moshe Idel,⁶ Elliot Wolfson,⁷ Alan Segal,⁸ J. Z. Smith,⁹ David Halperin,¹⁰ and Jarl Fossum,¹¹ among others.

¹ Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, 1941), pp. 54-55.

² *Ibid.*, p. 55.

³ See Gershom Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, pp. 43-55.

⁴ G. Stroumsa, "Form of God: Some Notes on Metatron and Christ," *Harvard Theological Review* 76 (1983).

⁵ Peter Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God: Some Major Themes in Early Jewish Mysticism*, trans. A. Pomeroy (Albany, 1992).

⁶ Moshe Idel, "Enoch is Metatron," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6, (1987) Hebrew: Here, Idel discusses Metatron in light of Adam traditions, both Jewish and Gnostic.

⁷ E. Wolfson, "The Image of Jacob Engraved on the Throne: Further Reflection on the Esoteric Doctrine of the 'German Progeny,'" in Elliot Wolfson, *Along the Path: Studies in Kabbalah, Myth, Symbolism and Hermeneutics*, Albany, 1995.

⁸ Alan Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports About Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden, 1977).

⁹ J. Z. Smith, "The Prayer of Joseph," in *Religion in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough* (London, 1976).

¹⁰ David Halperin, *The Faces of the Christ*, Tübingen, 1988.

¹¹ Jarl Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord: Samaritan and Jewish Concepts*.

Although the important role of the angelic vice regent and other intermediate figures cannot be ignored, it does not necessarily follow that the God of Merkabah mysticism was transcendent. It should also be emphasized that one should not expect to find identical theological positions in different forms of early Judaism or because of the polyphonic nature of Jewish literature in general, even within a single genre or text. In regards to Merkabah mysticism, in particular, a growing number of scholars have begun to reject an either/or approach in favor of a model which posits God's transcendence and immanence. As Peter Schäfer has argued concerning Hekhalot literature, echoing the earlier view of Joshua Abelson regarding rabbinic literature: "God is transcendent *and* immanent, at the same time hidden *and* revealed."¹⁴

Within Merkabah mysticism, God is frequently depicted as an exalted and highly remote figure. Thus Scholem was partly right when he described the gulf between humans and God in Merkabah mysticism. Yet, Scholem erred when he emphasized the impossibility of closing this gulf — that is, when he defined the God of Merkabah mysticism as absolutely inaccessible or transcendent. How was the distance between human beings and God breached in Merkabah mysticism? The answer to this question requires an appreciation of the paradoxical nature of the angelic vice regent.

In one respect, the angelic vice regent symbolizes the gulf between God and humans, between the divine and physical worlds. Indeed, without such a gulf there would be no need for the mediating functions of the angelic vice regent. At the same time, it must also be stressed that the angelic vice regent symbolizes the ability of human beings to breach the distance with God. In this respect, the angelic vice regent serves as a potent symbol of a continuum between human, angelic, and divine existence.

Thus, according to the Hekhalot text known as 3 *Enoch*, the angelic vice regent Metatron begins his career as a human, only to be transformed into a supra-angelic being, even a "lesser YHWH."

of Intermediation and the Origin of Gnosticism, Tübingen, 1985.

¹⁴ *The Hidden and Manifest: God*, p. 11. Eide describes a similar theological model in a Yoruba religion where the Highest God is both transcendent and immanent, yet generally delegates worldly affairs to a lower deity. See Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: the Nature of Religion*, New York, 1949, pp. 23-24. See also Eide, "The Paradox of Transcendence and Immanence of God in African Religions," *Religion* 15, 1985.

Once transformed, Metatron serves as a guide for R. Ishmael on his own journey through the hekhalot or heavenly palaces. Although 3 *Enoch* portrays God as distant and exalted, after all God lies at the end of a very long heavenly journey. God is not transcendent or inaccessible. Rather than keeping R. Ishmael and God apart, Metatron enables his human charge to achieve one of the most poignant and intimate visions of God preserved in any work of Jewish literature.

R. Ishmael said: Metatron said to me

Come and I will show you the right hand of the Omnipresent One, which has been banished behind him because of the destruction of the Temple. From it all kinds of brilliant lights shine and by it the 955 heavens were created. Even the seraphim and the ophanim are not allowed to look on it, till the day of salvation comes. I went with him and taking me by his hand he bore me up on his wings and showed it to me. Then the right hand of the Omnipresent One wept and five rivers of tears flowed from his five fingers and, falling into the Great Sea, made the whole world quake.¹⁹

By virtue of Metatron's mediation R. Ishmael is granted a vision of God prohibited to the seraphim and the ophanim. The underlying message of the episode is that while God's mercy in the world (symbolized by God's right hand) is temporarily restrained, God still loves Israel and has even empowered an angelic intermediary, the vice regent, Metatron, to bring his worthiest children to him, as it were even if he cannot or will not come to them.

Thus far I have concentrated on the issue of mediation in early Judaism and, in particular, in Merkabah mysticism. Mediating figures also occupy a significant place in Gnosticism and Mandaeism. Indeed, without such figures the essential drama of Gnostic and Mandaean mythology would be impossible. The antipodal processes which drive the motor of these systems are creation and salvation. Both require intermediate figures such as the demiurge and the saviour. Vice regent figures in Gnosticism and Mandaeism reign over the space and time between creator and salvation. These intermediary roles are reflected in ambivalent characters. Thus angelic vice regent figures in Gnosticism and Mandaeism possess demarginal and salvific characteristics.

¹⁹ 3 *Enoch* 48A, as cited in P. S. Alexander, "3 (Hebrew Apocalypse of) Enoch," pp. 300-301. On the image of God's right hand being placed behind his back because of the destruction of the Temple, see *Lamentations Rabbah* 24 (drawing on Lamentations 2:3: "He placed his right hand behind him from before the enemy").

An analysis of angelic vice regent traditions sheds light on the complex development of radical dualism and its theological alternatives in Late Antiquity. According to Giles Quispel,⁴⁰ Alan Segal,⁴¹ Nils Dahl,⁴² Jarl Fossum,⁴³ and Ioan Couhano,⁴⁴ the Gnostic demiurge emerged from the radicalization of Jewish binitarian or dytheistic traditions. Alan Segal, in particular, has created a cogent model to explain the development of radical Gnostic dualism from Jewish doctrines of an exalted angel or vice regent figure. In his book, *Two Powers in Heaven*, Segal theorizes that originally dytheistic or binitarian proto-Gnostics were radicalized as a result of 'the battle between the rabbis, the Christians and various other "two powers" sectarians who inhabited the outskirts of Judaism [emphasis in original]'.⁴⁵

Early or proto-Gnostics attacked the god of the Hebrew Bible by depicting him as a lower deity, a kind of reverse image of the angelic vice regent. Although he was depicted as the true god's enemy, the Gnostic demiurge resembled the angelic vice regent in many respects. He functioned as the creator and ruler of the physical world and as a de facto guardian of the divine realm, although in this case, he attempted to prevent all human beings from ascending to

⁴⁰ Quispel, 'The Demiurge in the Apocalypse of John', in *Age of Haman and Gnosticism*, ed. R. McL. Wilson (Leiden, 1974), pp. 25-33, idem, 'The Origins of the Gnostic Demiurge', *Gnostic Studies* (Louvain, 1974), p. 139. 'If we are willing to admit the Jewish roots of Gnosticism, we see that the "two powers" concept is interesting and that absolute dualism is a later development, based upon and originating from the relative dualism of Jewish Gnosticism.'

⁴¹ Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, p. 1. 'Whenever the second figure in heaven is seen in negative, we are dealing with a radically gnostic system. Not until then can we say definitively that a gnostic heresy presents. In all the earliest traditions the second figure is always seen as a complementary figure suggesting, but he notion of a divine helper who shared God's name is the basic concept which developed into heresy, not a redeemed redeemer.'

⁴² Nils Dahl, 'The Angelic Vision and the Lower Sophia: Jewish Traditions in Gnostic Revolt', in Bentley Layton, ed., *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, Vol. II (Leiden, 1981), p. 211. 'writes: diverse Jewish sources indicate that the contact between proto-gnostic (whom Dahl identifies as some fringe group of hellenized Judaism, not early Christianity) and more orthodox Jewish exegeses extended over a long period of time. Under the attack of anti-Jewish monotheism, some early form of gnosticism was radicalized.'

⁴³ Fossum, *The Angel of the Lord*, p. 281. 'It is far more probable that Jewish mysticism in this respect reflects the kind of dualism of subordination which was the matrix of Gnostic dualism.'

⁴⁴ Couhano, 'The Angels of the Nations and the Origins of Gnostic Dualism', in R. van den Broek and M.J. Vermaseren, eds., *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religion: Presented to Giles Quispel on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday* (Leiden, 1981), p. 78.

⁴⁵ Alan Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, p. 265.

the divine realm, rather than just unworthy individuals. Some Gnostics divided the biblical god into two figures — one, an evil or ignorant demiurge (Ialdabaoth) and two, a vice regent who opposed the demiurge and served the high god of the Pleroma (Sabaoth). As we will see, this is the relationship between the demiurge Ialdabaoth and his wayward son Sabaoth, in a number of Gnostic texts from the Nag Hammadi Library.

The transformation of the God of the Hebrew Bible into one or more lower figures suggests that Gnosticism understood itself to be in competition with Judaism and Christianity or, putated differently, that it saw itself as a corrective to these traditions. This observation raises another issue which will be central to the present work. On the one hand, Mandaeen, Gnostic, and Jewish vice regent traditions have many parallels, reflecting as I will argue in the next chapter, structural similarities as well as a common literary and exegetical heritage. On the other hand, there is evidence that these movements employed their respective vice regent myths for polemical purposes, either to undermine parallel figures in competing traditions or to undermine other cosmological and theological beliefs which were associated with these vice regent figures.

CHAPTER TWO

MYTH AND EXEGESIS

The angelic vice regent is a mythological figure. For a long time, scholars downplayed or even rejected the significance of myth in both rabbinic Judaism and Merkabah mysticism. As recent studies have shown, however, the imaginative world of late antique Judaism provided fertile ground for mythological speculation. By contrast, scholars have long appreciated myth as an important if not defining feature of Gnosticism and Mandaeism. In this chapter, I will situate the angelic vice regent within the broader study of myth. I will also examine the important role which exegesis plays in the construction of the different versions of the myth of the angelic vice regent. Two schools of thought in particular have influenced my observations on myth: the history of religions approach developed by Mircea Eliade and the structuralist model of myth formulated by Claude Lévi-Strauss. While both methodologies have their weaknesses, one of their common strengths is an ability to illuminate the significance of mediation in mythical thought.

One of the goals of this study is to further explore the relationship between Merkabah mysticism, Gnosticism, and Mandaeism on the basis of their shared mythologoumena. If the mythologies of Gnosticism, Mandaeism and Merkabah mysticism are likeigsaw puzzles, then one of the most important pieces in each puzzle is the angelic vice regent. The similar profiles of the angelic vice regents in these religious movements reflects two major factors: a shared logic and a common body of traditions.

Lévi-Strauss' goal in his far reaching studies has been "to define each myth by the set (*ensemble*) of all its versions."¹ The encyclope-

¹ I have examined the debate over this issue in *The Gnostic Imagination*, pp. 4-17.

For example, Michael Frothingham, "The Measures of God: Chores in the Ancient Merkabah," in *Merkabah and Christ: Studies in the Jewish Origins of Christianity* (Leiden, 1992); Elliot Wolfson, "Voluntary Ascent and Embodiment in the Hekhalot Literature," in *Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, 1994); G. Stroumsa, "Forms of God: Some Notes on Metatron and Christ," *Medieval Jewish Mysticism*, Metatron.

Anthropologie Structurale (Paris, 1948), p. 174. For the use of his approach in the study of Gnosticism, G. Stroumsa's *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology* (Leiden, 1989), p. 2.

dic character of his oeuvre testifies to Lévi-Strauss' almost heroic attempt to map out the many versions of different myths. My own enterprise is less ambitious. Instead of exhaustively examining the *ensemble* of transformations of the myth of the angelic vice-regent, I seek to define its basic structure or morphology and to comparatively examine three representative examples of this mythological type.

Myths are narratives about etologies and origins. Their characters are divine or semi-divine figures whose actions become paradigmatic for human beings. The angelic vice-regent functions as a mythological figure in a number of ways. He is frequently associated with the creation of the world, either as a demiurgic figure, himself, or as a close associate of the demiurge. As we will see, his story of transformation is a model for human beings to imitate. The message of his tale, like that of other myths, is the possibility of commerce between human and divine beings.

The morphology of the angelic vice-regent is as follows: 1. Demiurgic function; 2. Guardian of the gate, the abode of God; 3. Ruler of human and/or angelic beings; 4. Judge; 5. Priest; 6. Hypostatic form of the divine anthropos; 7. Composite or hybrid ontology, his characteristics of God, human, angel. The glue which binds these elements is the *logic of mediation*. Although not every angelic vice-regent figure exhibits all of these characteristics, each figure exhibits many of them. In this respect my approach draws on a body of scholarship concerning another mythological figure, the trickster. As William Hynes has written, "a number of shared characteristics appear to cluster together in a pattern that can serve as an index to the presence of the trickster." Not every trickster necessarily has all of these characteristics. Still, more times than not, a specific trickster will exhibit many of these similarities. Hynes and others have suggested employing shared characteristics as a matrix by which to survey all known examples of tricksters and to judge their degree of "tricksteriness."⁴

Mircea Eliade's form of religious phenomenology is sometimes contrasted with structuralism.⁵ Yet there is much in common be-

⁴ William Hynes, "Mapping the Characteristics of Mythic Tricksters: A Heuristic Guide," in William J. Hynes and William Doty, eds., *Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts, and Criticisms*, Tuscaloosa and London, 1993.

⁵ Two exceptions are J. Z. Smith and Ego Bianchi who have both noted the ritualological nature of Eliade's work. See J. Z. Smith, "Adde Panem Parve Magnus Acervus Ent," in *Map is Not Territory*, Chicago, 1993 (reprint), pp. 254ff. Smith includes phenomenology, which he uses only in the loose sense currently employed by historians of religions, and Eliade's work, in particular, in the category of "Left

between Levi-Strauss' definition of myth as the mediation between opposites and Eliade's description of the paradox of the hierophany as the "coming-together of sacred and profane, of being and non-being, absolute and relative, the eternal and the becoming".¹ Like the androgyne in Eliade's *The Two and the One*, the angelic vice regent symbolizes the *coincidentia oppositorum* that is at the core of religious thinking.

Just as the angelic vice regent embodies the dialectic of religious thought, so he functions as a model for the religious transformation of the human being. As the guardian of the gate (i.e. the portal) between the physical world and the divine realm, the angelic vice regent oversees what Eliade calls a

frontier that distinguishes and opposes two worlds — and at the same time the paradoxical place where those worlds communicate where passage from the profane to the sacred world becomes possible. The threshold, the door show the solution of continuity in space immediately and concretely, hence their great religious importance, for they are symbols and at the same time vehicles of passage from the one space to the other.²

J. Z. Smith adds that this "point of communication" is repeatable by man.³ It is therefore not surprising that the angelic vice regent oversees the passage of human beings from this world to the realm of God, where in Merkabah mysticism, Gnosticism, and Mandaeism the successful individual is spiritually and physically transformed through a process of angelification or divinization. The model for this process is the vice regent himself, whose ontological ambiguity symbolizes the potential transition from one mode of existence to another, and who, in the case of Metatron, has undergone a process of angelification, himself.

Other methodologies, along with structuralism and other morphological approaches, Ugo Bianchi, *The History of Religions*, Leiden, 1975, discusses Eliade and the "Morphology of the Holy".

¹ M. Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (New York, 1958), p. 29.

² M. Eliade, *The Two and the One* (New York, 1965).

³ M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p. 2.

⁴ J. Z. Smith, "The Wobbling Pivot" in *Map is Not Territory*, pp. 94-95.

⁵ On the divinization which allows entrance to the pleroma in Gnosticism, cf. G. Quispel, "Judaism, Jewish Christianity and Gnosticism" in *The New Testament and Gnostic Faith* in Honour of Robert A. L. Gordon, ed. A. H. B. Logan and A. J. M. Wedderburn (Edinburgh, 1981) esp. pp. 13-58. On the phenomenon of Merkabah mysticism, see E. E. W. Rieu, *Judaism as Merkabah* (Typology of Ecstasy and Esoterism), in *Ancient Jewish Mysticism: in Mystics of the Book, Themes, Topics, and Typologies*, ed. R. Heeren, New York, 1963.

Like a novice in a male puberty rite who is a "not-boy-not man," the angelic vice regent is a not-man-not-God.¹ Victor Turner refers to the novice as a liminal persona "betwixt and between" standard categories of structural classification — "neither one thing nor another, or may be both, or neither here nor there." And as Mary Douglas argues in *Purity and Danger* a thing which confuses categories can be dangerous.² Awareness of the hybrid character of the angelic vice regent sheds new light on the most famous episode involving the angelic vice regent Metatron: figures involved in "interstructural activities and liminal situations" are often exempt from standard taboos.³ Metatron has been given permission to sit down by God; that is, the taboo of angels sitting in heaven has been suspended. When Elsha unwittingly witnesses the breaking of this taboo, he is quite naturally confused and this confusion leads him to heresy: identifying Metatron as a "second power" or god in heaven. The angelic vice regent thus poses a challenge to what Louis Dumont has called *homo hierarchicus*.⁴ He is betwixt and between a great number of hierarchical categories: world/pleroma, man/god, sacred/profane.

The Trickster: Shadow of the Vice Regent

My analysis of the angelic vice regent has been influenced by the rich body of scholarship concerning the trickster. Unlike Jung's work on the trickster, my goal is not to define the angelic vice regent as a universal archetype, representing a particular stage of human consciousness.⁵ Instead I share Robert Peirce's view that "the trickster is not an archetypal idea, but a symbolic pattern that like the High God or the Divine Mother, includes a wide range of individual figures."⁶

¹ Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, Ithaca and London 1967, p. 35. For a study of liminality in Christianity which draws on Turner's method, see Ingrid Gullius, "Christianism: A Study in Liminal Symbolism," *Numen* 31, 1984.

² Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, London, 1966.

³ J. Z. Smith, "Birth Upside Down or Right Side Up?" in *Map is Not Territory*, pp. 149-150.

⁴ Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, Paris, 1967.

⁵ Carl Jung, "On the Psychology of the Trickster Figure," in Paul Radin, *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology*.

⁶ Robert Peirce, *The Trickster in West Africa: A Study in Mythic Irony and Sacred Delight*, Berkeley, 1980, p. 3. Claude Lévi-Strauss also rejects the theory of ideal archetypes.

The trickster and angelic vice regent share the same logic of mediation and many of the same personality traits. In his seminal essay "The Structural Study of Myth," Levi-Strauss chose the trickster as the definitive model for the structuralist method of interpreting myth.¹ Taking Levi-Strauss' observations to their logical conclusion, several scholars have argued that the trickster is not only a mediator *par excellence* but actually symbolizes the very "myth-making processes of the human mind itself."² Without mediation, binary opposition remains static. The trickster and the angelic vice regent embody the dialectical nature of mythical thinking, the transformation of binary into trinary structure.

Among the mediating figures that Levi-Strauss includes alongside the trickster are the messiah, sibling pair, and bisexual being.³ In the wake of Levi-Strauss' research, several scholars of Gnosticism have illustrated the parallels between the trickster and Gnostic figures such as the Demiurge,⁴ the aeon Sophia, and the Saviour.⁵ In some cases, these beings have even been defined as trickster figures them-

1. "The Structural Study of Myth," in *Structural Anthropology*, Vol. I (New York and London: 1963), p. 208. Let us remember, for instance, Jung's view that a given mythological pattern, the so-called archetype, possesses a certain meaning. This is comparable to the long-supported error that a sound may possess a certain affinity with a meaning.

2. C. Levi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," in *Structural Anthropology*, Vol. I, p. 224. See also p. 229. As Levi-Strauss writes: "Thus like Asin-Boy and Cinderella, the trickster is a mediator."

3. R. Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa*, p. 12, following Mac Lennett Ricketts, "The North American Indian Trickster," *History of Religion* 5, 1 (1965). Army Leitch Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory in Afro-American Literary Criticism* (Oxford: 1988), p. 75, makes a similar argument for the Signifying Monkey as a trickster figure. Gates writes: "Whereas Dr. Roger Abrahams wrote that the Monkey is a master of his technique, I can even more accurately write that he is technique."

4. *Structural Anthropology*, p. 224. Levi-Strauss' position has been sharply criticized by Klaus-Peter Köppling, "Abendgüte und Himmels-Tisch: Gnostische Imagologie und Gnostische Body Images as Manifestations of the Trickster," *History of Religion* 1, 1 (1985), p. 197.

5. On the relationship between the Gnostic Demiurge and the trickster of Igin Bianchi, "Der demurgische Trickster und die Rekonstruktion," and "Trickster e demurgo: processi di interazione culturale," in *Selected Essays on Gnosticism, Dualism and Mysticism* (Leiden: 1978) idem, *The History of Religion*, pp. 56, 57. Also see Eugene Sack's *Cultus: The Gnostic Demiurge: An Agnostic Trickster?* (*Religion* 14, 1984).

6. Joan Couliano, "Femine Versus Masculine: The Sophia Myth and the Origin of Feminism," in ed. H. G. Kypreios, *Struggles in Gods' Realm* (New York, 1984) idem, *The Tree of Gnosis*, pp. 24, 84, 24. Couliano argues that Gnostic mythology has two trickster figures, the male Demiurge and the female aeon Sophia.

7. Carl Jung, "On the Psychology of the Trickster Figure," p. 203 describes the trickster as "a forerunner of the saviour."

selves although this identification has not gone uncriticized.¹⁸

Both trickster and angelic vice regent are ambiguous and polymorphous figures. As Levi-Strauss writes concerning the trickster "Since his mediating function occupies a position halfway between polar terms, he must retain something of that duality — namely an ambiguous and equivocal character." Metatron, an angelic vice regent, and Hermes, a trickster, are depicted as at once old men and youth. Just as Metatron is portrayed as a human being transformed into a supra angelic figure, so the trickster is "less than a god but more than a human — not god but a god who is not god."¹⁹ The key hermeneutical issue for studying both the angelic vice regent and the trickster therefore becomes what Mac Janscott Ricketts has described as the need to penetrate the "kind of logic [that] combines all these disparate elements into one mythical personality."²⁰

The interstitial character of both angelic vice regent and trickster is reflected in the unusual spatial position they frequently occupy — namely at the threshold or boundary of the divine and physical worlds. The West African trickster figure Anansi, who is characterized as a spider, aptly illustrates this position for Anansi "lives on the ceiling but inside the house," that is, he is suspended between heaven and earth.²¹ Likewise, the angelic vice regents Sabaoth, Metatron, and Abathar are each enthroned at the ceiling of the

¹⁸ Cf. Stroumza's criticism of Lévi-Strauss, "The Gnostic Demurge: An Agnostic Trickster," in his article, "Myth into Metaphor: The Case of Prometheus," in S. Shaked, D. Stroumza, G. Stroumza, eds., *Gnostic Essays on Transformation, Revolution and Permanence in the History of Religions Dedicated to R. J. Zwi Werblowsky*, 1987. On p. 311 Stroumza writes: "A recent study devoted to the quest to demurge myths in his order to cross boundaries and on his dark, interstitial nature as basic features justifying him as a paradigm instance of a trickster. Yet the question remains whether he is called Yaldabaoth, i.e., creator of chaos. Sakas, the first of Sargat, the blind one, does not in any partake in the ambivalence inherent in the trickster. He does not have any redeeming features and accordingly is considered as an anti-god, rather threatening and dangerous or foolish and ridiculous."

¹⁹ *Structural Anthropology*, Vol. I, p. 226.

²⁰ William Drex, "A Lecture of Trouble-Making: Hermes as Trickster," in *Mythical Trickster Figure*, p. 48.

²¹ Describing the trickster Masman, Laura Makarius, "The Myth of the Trickster: The Necessary Demagogue," *Tahoe*, p. 84. In *Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts, and Contrasts*, On the multivalent outings of the trickster, see also "On the Psychology of the Trickster Figure," p. 23. Elsewhere Jung writes that the trickster is "God, man, and animal and once He is both subhuman and superhuman, a sensual and divine being."

Mac Janscott Ricketts, "The North American Indian Trickster," *History of Religions* 3, 1963, p. 32.

²² *The Trickster in West Africa*, pp. 59, 219.

physical world, at the entrance of the world of light or seventh hekhal. From this position both trickster and angelic vice regent act as agents of mediation between the divine and physical worlds, or as Karl Kerényi has written concerning the trickster, "messenger and mediator . . . [a] hoverer-between worlds who dwells in a world of his own."²⁹

Because of the trickster's mediating nature, ambiguity, and multivalence, Victor Turner has depicted the trickster as a liminal figure.³⁰ Indeed, Robert Peacock has gone so far as to call the trickster a "personified . . . amen, or a "symbol of the liminal state itself and of its permanent accessibility as a source of recreative power."³¹ This creative power does not derive entirely from the trickster's ability to mediate or synthesize binary oppositions à la Lévi-Strauss. Instead, Karl Kerényi's important observation that the trickster is "the spirit of disorder, the enemy of boundaries," must be added to Lévi-Strauss' emphasis on the synthesis of distinctions. Like carnival whose symbolic inversion of hierarchy actually serves to reinforce or reconstitute the same hierarchy, the trickster breaks taboos in order to reify already existing boundaries or even to create new ones.³²

Similarly, the angelic vice regent reinforces or establishes new boundaries by initially disrupting or challenging them. For example, the Mandaeen vice regent Abathur ruptures the lower boundary of the world of light by gazing below into the "dark waters." This rebellious act results in the establishment of the physical universe and the stratification of the boundary between this world and the world of light. In Jewish sources, Metatron challenges the boundary between divine and angelic natures by remaining seated when Aher encounters him. Metatron's behavior causes Aher to speculate on the possible existence of two divinities. Ultimately, however, Metatron's disruption of the heavenly order serves as an opportunity to reinforce the boundary between God and his chief angel. Finally, the Gnostic vice regent Sabaoth's rebellion against his evil father Ildabaoth actually serves to clarify rather than blur the boundary between the forces of good and evil. In all three cases, the initial dis-

²⁹ Karl Kerényi, "The Trickster in Relation to Greek Mythology," p. 189 in Paul Radin, *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology* (New York: 1956).

³⁰ Victor Turner, "Myth and Symbol," *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 10, pp. 580-581.

³¹ *The Trickster in West Africa*, pp. 35, 58.

³² "The Trickster in Relation to Greek Mythology," p. 185.

³³ On the breaking of taboos in order to show the existence of boundaries, cf. Laura Makarius, "The Magic of Transgression," *Antropos* 69 (1974).

ruption of boundaries or breaking of taboos ultimately results in the reinforcement of pre-existing boundaries or the creation of new ones.

The trickster "enters the human world to make things happen, to recreate boundaries. Then he returns to that hidden threshold which he embodies and makes available as a passage."⁸ Both trickster and angelic vice regent symbolize the ability of human beings to pass between sacred and profane modes of being. While reinforcing the existence of boundaries, the trickster and angelic vice regent also symbolize the elasticity, even permeability of the same boundaries. Like the trickster, the angelic vice regent is "at once an agent of disruption and an agent of reconciliation."⁹ For example, the Mandaeen figure Abathur sets into motion the creation of the physical world by rebelliously gazing below the Pleroma, but afterwards, he actively functions to restore the unity of the Pleroma by weighing human souls and restoring those found worthy to their pleromatic home.

Like a bricoleur, the angelic vice regent destroys or transforms existing structures in order to create new ones. Trickster and angelic vice regent alike are frequently portrayed as demarginal figures. Related to his demarginal function, the angelic vice regent is sometimes depicted as the hypostatic divine phallus. This phallic quality is also a common feature of trickster figures like Hermes, who is often portrayed ithyphallically.¹⁰

As might be guessed, the relationship of the trickster and the high god is one of great ambivalence. The trickster is often portrayed as a rival of the high god. Frequently the trickster attempts to imitate or usurp the unique powers of the high god.¹¹ Yet the trickster can also be the high god's accomplice or collaborator.¹² Indeed, the West African trickster Eshu is depicted as the "marshal" of the divine court.¹³ Paul Radin suggests two mythological etiologies for the

⁸ *Mythical Trickster Figures*, p. 60.

⁹ *The Trickster in West Africa*, p. 75.

¹⁰ *Mythical Trickster Figures*, p. 48.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 27, "He [the trickster] is . . . the High God's accomplice and his rival."

¹² On the trickster's tendency to imitate the High God, cf. William Hynes, "Mapping the Characteristics of the Mythic Tricksters: A Heuristic Guide," pp. 33-41, and Christopher Vecsey, "The Exception Which Proves the Rule: Ananse the Akan Trickster," p. 113, in *Mythical Trickster Figures: Contexts, Contents, and Criticisms*.

¹³ On the characterization of the trickster as the High God's accomplice, cf. n. 29 *supra*. For a depiction of the trickster as a collaborator of the Supreme Being, see Ugo Bianchi, *The History of Religions*, p. 45.

¹⁴ *The Trickster in West Africa*, p. 100.

ambivalent relationship between the trickster and the high god. Either the trickster represents a human hero who was transformed and elevated to the rank of a semi-deity, or, conversely, a deity who was displaced and demoted to the rank of semi-deity by the high god.¹ In both scenarios, the trickster competes and/or collaborates with the high god.

The angelic vice regent also has an ambivalent relationship with the high god. Like the trickster, the angelic vice regent frequently imitates the high god e.g. Metatron's siming Abathur's procreative activity. This mimetic behaviour brings the angelic vice regent into conflict with the high god since it undermines his uniqueness. Nevertheless, the angelic vice regent also helps the high god by mediating between him and the physical world. Finally, like the trickster, the angelic vice regent is sometimes depicted as a transformed human hero (Metatron), a demoted deity (Abathur), or a combination of the two (Sabaoth).

The identification of the African trickster Eshu as marshal of the divine court raises another parallel between the trickster and the angelic vice regent. Indeed, in the case of Eshu, the boundary between trickster and angelic vice regent is blurred, since the role of marshal is extremely close to that of vice regent. Eshu's position, while not accorded to the majority of tricksters, highlights the important role of the trickster within the divine court or hierarchy. Unlike Eshu, however, most tricksters are shadow members of the divine hierarchy, rather than officially empowered figures.

During the medieval period and later, the trickster figure became a significant member of the court, both as a literary trope, and, in the guise of the jester, in the actual courts of European royalty. In both contexts, the human trickster evinced the same ambivalent relationship with the king that his mythological brother shared with the high god.² Officially, the purpose of the court fool or jester was to entertain. Unofficially, however, the jester cynically challenged the king's authority by way of farce and imitation, and also served the collaborative function of mediating between the king and his audience by comically evaluating or judging the individuals who came to see the king. Thus, the court fool of the medieval period is another

¹ *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology*, pp. 125, 162-164.

² On the medieval fool and its relationship to earlier mythological trickster figures, see "Iconographical Notes Towards a Definition of the Medieval Fool" in Ed. Paul Williams, *The Fool and the Trickster: Studies in Honour of Eino Wierstam*, Cambridge, England, 1979.

version of the myth of the trickster, just as Levi-Strauss has argued that Freud's writings on the Oedipus complex are "on a par with earlier or seemingly more 'authentic' versions of the Oedipus myth, such as Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*."

Like the trickster, the vice regent is also a member of the royal court, whether divine or human (in Jewish sources the heavenly court is referred to as the "*sanctus* on high"). The same ambivalence which governs the relationship between the angelic vice regent and the high god also governs the relationship between the human vice regent and the king. Both human and angelic vice regents are frequently guilty of imitating the ruler or usurping his power and authority. Yet, both angelic and human vice regents perform a number of necessary collaborative and mediating functions. Thus, trickster and vice regent are both subversive and collaborative — at once undermining and helping the ruler.

Although angelic vice regents and tricksters have much in common the categories should not be conflated. While both figures function ambivalently vis-a-vis the high god, the angelic vice regent operates from a position of official authority within the hierarchy, that is he is divinely appointed to perform many of his mediating functions. By contrast, the trickster almost always operates from a position of unofficial authority within the hierarchy, even when he appears as the court fool, whose official function is to entertain not mediate between the king and his subjects.

Because of his permanently unstable position within the official hierarchy, the trickster must consistently rely on cunning and trickery in mediating between the gods and humanity, a "Prometheus." By contrast the angelic vice regent, due to his official empowerment and position, is not definitively tricky, although he may rely on trickery when other means of achieving a goal fail.⁴ In relation to one another, therefore, the angelic vice regent and trickster are like mirror images. Despite their differences, both trickster and angelic vice

⁴ *Structural Anthropology*, Vol. I, p. 216.

⁵ On the characterization of Prometheus as a trickster, cf. Ugo Bianchi, "Prometheus: der autonome Trickster," in *Severid Essays on Mysticism, Dualism and Mysticism*, and Gedaliahu Stroumsa, "The Case of Prometheus."

⁶ Just in a Mandaean myth called "Abathurs Klage" by Lidzbarski, the High God orders Abathur to take up residence at the entrance of the World of Light. After protesting his demotion without success, Abathur tricks the divine being Hail Ziwa to take his place. "Abathurs Klage" comprises pp. 232-34 sec. 79-72 of Lidzbarski's *Das Johannebuch der Mandäer*, Gießen, 1915.

regent fulfil what Robert Paxon has called the 'need for healthy commerce between what is above and what is below'.¹⁴

Mythopoetic Exegesis

The vice regent is a central figure in the mythologies of Late Antiquity. Gnosticism and Mandaeism both possess highly complex mythological systems which drew on a number of earlier traditions for inspiration. Among the most important sources for Gnostic and Mandaean myths are the events and figures in the Hebrew Bible. Far from devaluing the Hebrew Bible as was previously thought, it has become clear that Gnostics employed biblical exegesis as one of the primary means for generating their own mythological systems.¹⁵ This exegetical transformations were often mythological transformations, as well.

Bruce Pearson describes the interpretations of key Old Testament text' as the "building blocks" of Gnostic thought.¹⁶ Indeed, some texts are best described as Gnostic midrash, so closely do they resemble rabbinic exegetical traditions in their hermeneutical approach and their content.¹⁷ In addition to the structural parallels between Gnostic and rabbinic exegesis, Gnostic authors sometimes borrowed

¹⁴ Robert Paxon, *The Trickster in West Africa*, p. 2.

¹⁵ Robert Paxon, *The Trickster in West Africa*, p. 2. Scholarly literature on the role of biblical exegesis in Gnosticism includes, but is certainly not limited to, Karl Willigand Frager, ed. *Alte Testament und Gnosticismus* (Göttingen, 1960); R. McL. Wilson, 'Old Testament Exegesis in the Nag Hammadi Exegesis of the Bible', in *Essays on the Nag Hammadi Texts in Honour of Peter Lich*, ed. M. Krause (Leiden, 1975); R. Kasser, 'Catena des grands prophètes bibliques dans les textes gnostiques coptes', inidem O. Wintermute, 'A Study of Gnostic Exegesis of the Old Testament in *The Use of the Old Testament in the Acts and Other Essays*', ed. J. M. Ford (Durham, 1972); M. Krause, 'Ausagen über das alte Testament in 71 koptischen apokryphen gnostischen Texten aus Nag Hammadi', *Fa Oboe Religionem: studia Gnostologica*, Leiden, 1972; J. Kasser, 'Gen 1:26 and 2' in *Judaism, Samaritanism and Christianity: Journal for the Study of Judaism* 16 (1985); G. Quispel, 'Ezekiel 1:26 in Jewish Mysticism and Gnosticism', *Journal of Theology* 34 (1980). Also important are the attempts made to distinguish between Gnostic and orthodox Christian exegesis by Eusebius Pagels, 'Pursuing the Spiritual Eve: Imagery and Hermeneutics in the *Hypodistichy of the Archons* and the *Gospel of Philip*', in *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, ed. Karen King, Philadelphia, 1988, esp. p. 189.

¹⁶ Pearson, 'The Development of Gnostic Self-Definition in Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity', Minneapolis, 1994, p. 125. For the term 'building blocks' see also Pearson, 'The Pedagogical of Jewish Gnostic Literature', in C. Heitsch and R. Houton, eds. *Nag Hammadi Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (Peabody, MA, 1986), p. 34.

¹⁷ See Pearson, 'Jewish Haggadic Traditions in *The Testament of Truth* from Nag Hammadi CG IX. 3', in *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*, pp. 42ff.

Jewish midrashic traditions and placed them within their own narratives.²⁷

The role of biblical traditions in Mandaean mythology is no less significant. Although Edwin Yamauchi downplays the influence of Judaism on Mandaeism in general, he admits that "the Mandaean knowledge of the Old Testament was more extensive — if not more intensive — than that of many Gnostics whose knowledge seems not to have exceeded the prefallarian section of Genesis."²⁸ In fact, it is my contention that Mandaean and Gnostic authors — like their Jewish counterparts — transformed mythological material in biblical and apocalyptic texts into new myths of vice regent figures. These mythopoietic transformations indicate that Gnostics and Mandaeans shared a broader knowledge of Jewish literary sources than generally acknowledged.

Gershom Scholem frequently downplayed the importance of both myth and exegesis in Merkabah mysticism. According to Scholem, the most representative Merkabah texts "are precisely those which are almost entirely free from the exegetical element."²⁹ Scholem also wrote that Merkabah texts are "essentially descriptions of a genuine religious experience for which no sanction is sought in the Bible."³⁰ Nevertheless, Scholem acknowledged that Merkabah mysticism drew on biblical literature for its images and "basic categories of thought."³¹ Scholem's equivocation on this issue reflects a profound ambivalence about how to characterize Merkabah mysticism, a topic I have examined in great detail elsewhere.³²

Recent studies have emphasized the significant presence of myth and exegesis — and the link between them — in Merkabah mysticism. If, as a number of scholars have argued, apocalypticism represents a secondary explosion of myth, then Gnosticism, Mandaeism, and Merkabah mysticism may be described as branches of a tertiary explosion.³³ Not only did these movements refigure ancient Near

²⁷ See Forman's statement of purpose in "Gen. 1:26 and 2:7 in Judaism, Samaritanism, and Christianity," p. 263. The scope of this paper is to restore an ancient Jewish background to Gen. 1:26 and trace its subsequent development.

²⁸ E. Yamauchi, *The Christian Gnosticism* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1973), p. 56.

²⁹ *Major Trends*, p. 45.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.* An example of what might be called "biblical inspiration" as opposed to biblical exegesis was the reference of Ezekiel 1:26, Song of Songs 5:10-6, and Psalm 147:5 on the formulation of the *Shur Komah*.

³² This is a major focus of my work *The Gnostic Imagination*.

³³ See Frank Cross, *Conscience after and before Eden* (Cambridge, MA, 1973); Paul Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia, 1975); John Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination* (New York, 1984).

Eastern and biblical mythologoumena, they also adopted and transformed mythical motifs from apocalyptic sources. The critical role of exegesis in the development of angelic vice regent traditions reflects a general trend in late antique angelology. As Saul Olyan writes, "Exegesis is at least a major aspect if not the most significant component, of the elusive framework sought by scholars in order better to understand the development of ideas about angels in late biblical and post-biblical texts."

In most cases, the relationship between late antique vice regent myths and earlier Jewish literary sources is not indicated by the explicit citation of a biblical or apocalyptic text. Instead the formulation of angelic vice regent traditions in Gnosticism, Mandaeism, and Merkabah mysticism often reflects what Michael Fishbane has called "implicit" or "virtual" exegesis, or what Carol Newsome has referred to as "traditional-historical transformations." According to Fishbane, where the explicit citation of a biblical lemma is absent the identification of implicit exegesis depends on two basic criteria:

1. "multiple and sustained lexical linkages" between two texts.
2. The lexical reorganization and topical rethematization of an earlier text by a later text.

Drawing on Fishbane's work, Newsome has suggested that in some cases, the relationship is better described as traditional-historical, rather than exegetical. Newsome illustrates this distinction in her work on Merkabah exegesis in the Qumran Sabbath Shurot:

I would for instance identify Ezekiel 14 and Daniel 7 as traditional-historical developments of Ezekiel's merkabah visions but not exegetical transformations of Ezekiel. In these passages certain motifs from Ezekiel's description of the divine throne-chariot are combined with other traditions about the heavenly seat, the divine court, etc., in order to create a picture of the heavenly court. In neither case, however, are there "multiple and sustained lexical linkages" with the text of Ezekiel.

The most striking exegetical transformation shared by Jewish, Gnostic, and Mandaean vice regent traditions is that the enthroned figure in Daniel 7:9-10 has now become a prototype for the angelic vice regent. This move—common to all three traditions—is significant because in the biblical text, the enthroned Ancient of Days

* Saul Olyan, *A Thousand Thousands Served Him: Angels and the Naming of Angels in Ancient Judaism*, Tübingen, 1993, p. 1.

* Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, Oxford, 1985, pp. 285ff.
 Carol Newsome, "Merkabah Exegesis in the Qumran Sabbath Shurot," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 38, 1987, p. 17.

atq yomin is almost certainly God, whereas the late antique documents apply the same imagery to a lower figure. This transformation suggests a general tendency within late antique religions to characterize the angelic vice regent as the hypostatic form of God.

In at least two instances, Jewish texts explicitly cite the verse from Daniel when describing the angelic vice regent. Gnostic and Mandaean texts are better described as having an implicit exegetical or even a traditional-historical relationship with Daniel 7, since they never actually cite the biblical lemma itself. On the other hand, they do possess "lexical linkages" with the biblical text. This is particularly the case with the Mandaean sources. The apparent appeal of the Book of Daniel to at least some Mandaeans reflects several factors. The book's story of exile from the land of Israel to Babylonia resembles the Mandaean's own myth of origin (see the Hara-Gawaita); the Babylonian context of the work would have resonated with the Mandaeans. Finally, the critical verses in Daniel 7:9-10 are written in a dialect of Aramaic comprehensible to the Mandaic, another form of Aramaic speaking Mandaeans.

CHAPTER THREE

IN PRAISE OF METATRON

The angel known as Metatron appears in a host of Jewish sources from the Talmud to the Kabbalah. The following chapters will focus on Metatron in rabbinic and Hekhalot texts, material which straddles the border between Late Antiquity and the early medieval period. Peter Schäfer has made great strides in both assembling the Hekhalot manuscripts and analyzing the stages in their composition and redaction. Schäfer has redefined the study of Hekhalot literature by focusing on the issue of literary development, proposing a stage-by-stage series of compositions and redactions instead of an early, defining period of composition and codification. Schäfer has concluded that to speak of "texts" let alone "Urtexts" is an erroneous assumption in the Hekhalot literature. Instead, smaller literary units were composed and redacted along a time line of hundreds of years.

Opinions concerning the historical milieu for the composition and redaction of the Hekhalot literature have ranged from Graetz, who posited a post-Islamic setting, to Scholem, who argued for a Tannaitic or early Amoraic date of composition¹ and set the authors of the Hekhalot literature "near the center of rabbinic Judaism, not on its fringes," due to the Halakic character of the Hekhalot literature.

See especially Schäfer's essays "Tradition and Redaction in Hekhalot Literature," *Hekhalot Studies*, Tübingen, 1988, pp. 4-16 and "The Problem of Compositional Identity of 'Hekhalot Rabbati,'" *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* Vol. 6, 1, 1987, pp. 1-12. According to Schäfer it is dubious to speak of Hekhalot texts, such as Hekhalot Rabbati or Ma'aseh Merkabah, per se (see, "Tradition and Redaction," p. 15). Instead, the manuscripts as we have them can be most accurately broken down into smaller literary units. Schäfer also criticizes the search for "Urtexts" or "Urforms," which he thinks beguile "many" since original texts may not have existed at all. Michael Schwartz has applied this compositional theory to the text *Ma'aseh Merkabah* in his book, *Mythic Power in Ancient Judaism: An Analysis of Ma'aseh Merkabah*, Tübingen, 1991.

¹ Although Scholem accepted that the Hekhalot literature developed in stages, he was also convinced that at the base of the Hekhalot tradition were original texts. See *Jewish Mysticism*, p. 77.

² Heinrich Graetz, "Die mystische Literatur in der gaonischen Epoche," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 8, 1859, pp. 72-3.

³ G. Scholem, *Ursprung und Anfänge der Kabbala*, Berlin, 1962, pp. 15-20.

Jewish Mysticism, p. 12.

Recently a number of scholars have re-opened the question of who wrote the *Heikhalot* literature, a topic I will discuss below. Although no definitive statement can be made concerning the site of composition, evidence suggests that even if many of the *Heikhalot* traditions originated in Palestine, they may have received their full development in Babylonia, a theory which makes the possibility of cross-pollination between Merkabah mysticism and Mandaeism more intriguing.

I will not attempt to provide a comprehensive treatment of Metatron in these sources. Instead my goal is to show how the texts in which Metatron appears reflect two opposing tendencies within Merkabah mysticism. The first tendency seeks to destabilize, blur, or even eliminate the ontological and functional boundaries between human, angelic, and divine beings. The second tendency is to enforce or to poetically re-assert these boundaries, thereby producing passages which embody the unbreachable gulf between human beings and God mentioned by Gershom Scholem. The figure of the angelic vice-regent is at the center of this critical debate and may be said to mediate between the two positions. I will first examine those Merkabah traditions which depict the angelic vice-regent as a figure who calls into question the impermeability of different categories of beings.

Metatron as Divine Man

The importance of temples in the ancient Near East cannot be overestimated. They were at once cosmic and cultural centers. In societies from Babylonia to Greece temples were understood to be no less than bridges between the heavens and the earth. Likewise, the cadres of priests devoted to the upkeep and function of these sacred spaces were empowered as living conduits between divine and human beings. For a temple to be destroyed was a cataclysmic event for the people who worshipped within its precincts. The trauma becomes more understandable to modern readers when we appreci-

*See P.S. Alexander, "The Historical Setting of the Hebrew Book of Enoch," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 28 (1977) p. 80, where Alexander argues that *Heikhalot* literature developed in "orthodox" circles although "There was probably a less orthodox form of the teaching." I will discuss various theories concerning the authorship of the *Heikhalot* writings below.

ate that many ancient peoples considered their temple to be the navel *Gk. omphalos* of the world. When this connection was violently severed, an entire culture felt a shock comparable to being torn from the womb, an image which captures the reaction of the ancient Israelites to the destruction of the First Temple in Jerusalem.

The impact of the destruction of the Second Temple on late antique Jewish culture has long been debated. Some scholars have argued that the destruction of the Temple was the primary catalyst for the development of rabbinic Judaism. Out of the ashes of 70 CE, a new religious and cultural edifice emerged. Instead of a building made of stones and mortar, the rabbis built a discursive structure consisting of text: the *Tanakh* and exegesis *midrash*. Within this new context, pilgrimage consisted of re-visiting the Bible and offering one's own interpretations upon the altar of the text. As Jacob Neusner has written, in place of the temple, works like the *Mishnah* allowed Israel "to experience anywhere and anytime that cosmic center of the world".

Other scholars have argued, however, that even before 70 CE, a cultural shift occurred in the Mediterranean world away from locative religious structures, such as temples, and towards more anthropocentric modes of religious expression which focused on charismatic religious figures.⁴ The destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem thus gave concrete expression to a cultural process already underway. The increased focus on messianic figures and "divine men" in Late Antiquity is evidence of such a transition, with Jesus serving as the best known example of this phenomenon.

Rather than arguing for a complete contrast between these forms of religiosity, I would like to suggest that both before and after 70 CE, groups within Judaism combined locative, exegetical, and anthropocentric elements in their practice and ideology. The Dead

Jacob Neusner, "Map Without Territory: Mishnah's System of Sacrifice and Sanctuary," *History of Religions* 19, 19-86.

⁴J.Z. Smith, writes in "Earth and Gods," *Map & Not Territory*, 28, "If the Temple had not been destroyed, it would have had to be ~~re-imagined~~. For it represented a locative type of religious activity no longer perceived as efficacious in a new utopian religious situation with a concomitant shift from a cosmocentric to an anthropocentric view-point. In other words, Smith has qualified the notion by adding that not all locative religious structures were eliminated in Late Antiquity. See, for example, "The Temple and the Magician," in *id.*, p. 186. But I believe that a more complex model is called for — one that might better account for a large class of cultic phenomena that exhibit characteristics of mobility, what I would ~~call~~ religious citizenship and which represent both a reinterpretation and a reaffirmation of native locative, celebratory categories of religious practice and thought.

Sea Scrolls reflect this cluster of elements, with their focus on messianic figures, the presence of a charismatic leader the Teacher of Righteousness, an intense but critical interest in the Temple in Jerusalem and the beginnings of midrashic-type exegesis.⁵ Early Christianity also reflects this combination of *topoi*. Peter Brown has written that "In the popular imagination, the emergence of the holy man at the expense of the temple marks the end of the classical world."⁶ Yet, the New Testament actually reinscribes the importance of the temple as a religious category in a number of ways including Paul's description of the body as a temple where the image of the divine man and the temple are organically integrated, the eschatological role of the heavenly temple, and even Jesus' condemnation of the contemporary Temple which nevertheless reflects his devotion to the sanctity of the institution. Finally rabbinic literature and, in particular, the Mishnah is notable for its discussion of laws and traditions concerning the Temple, despite the fact that this literature was produced years after the Temple's physical destruction. All of these examples highlight the degree to which the Temple functioned as a conceptual category as much as an actual physical place of worship. Thus even if the Temple no longer existed as a site of pilgrimage and sacrifice, it continued to exert great influence on the religious imagination in Late Antiquity.

One of the chief ways the Temple was reconceptualized in late antique Judaism was the development of the heavenly temple. This phenomenon may be traced to the period before the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and is intimately linked to the apocalyptic focus on the heavens, their angelic inhabitants, and contents. The heavenly temple also became the locus of a new form of pilgrimage — the heavenly ascent — a theme which runs from apocalyptic works to the later Merkabah material.⁷

Within the heavenly temple the role of the high priest was filled by an angelic or semi-divine figure whose identity differed depending on the particular community or text. Michael, Metatzedek, Akatriel, Jesus, and Metatron were each described as high priests in

⁵ On these issues, see B. Gartner, *The Temple and the Community in Qumran and the New Testament*, Cambridge, 1965.

⁶ Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*, London, 1971, 102ff.

On his development, see Johann Maier, *Vom Hohen zu Gnomon*, Saisburg, 1964.

On the idea of the ascent — the Merkabah as a form of pilgrimage — see Ira Chernus, "The Pilgrimage — the Merkabah: An Interpretation of Early Jewish Mysticism," in *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6 (1-2), 1987, p. 9.

the heavenly tabernacle.¹ The characterization of Metatron as a high priest appears in a number of texts including 3 *Enoch*, a Hekhalot text with marked affinities with earlier apocalyptic literature including the other works in what is commonly called the Enochian corpus.² 3 *Enoch* 13 refers to 'a great heavenly tabernacle of light' where Metatron serves as the high priest. In the *Shiur Qomah* literature, we find mention of the *mashkan ha-na'ar* or "the tabernacle of the Youth [i.e. Metatron]."³ One of the most striking references appears in the midrashic collection called *Numbers Rabbah*, where Metatron is described as follows:

When the Holy One blessed be He told Israel to set up the tabernacle, he intimated to the ministering angels that they should also construct a tabernacle. And when one was erected below, the other was erected on high. The latter was the tabernacle of the Youth, whose name is Metatron, and there he offers up the souls of the righteous to atone for Israel in the days of their exile. [*Numbers Rabbah* 12:12]

The tradition of Metatron as the high priest reflects a conjunction of locative-temple-oriented and anthropocentric divine man modes of religiosity.⁴ J. Z. Smith has written that "Rather than celebration, purification and pilgrimage, the new rituals will be those of conversion, of initiation into the secret society or identification with the divine man."⁵ Although some movements in Late Antiquity reflect the transition mentioned by Smith, others, including Merkabah mysticism, combine elements of both modes of religiosity, as well as at

¹ On the well-attested tradition of Michael as the high priest of 3E Hagigah 12b, *Midrashoth Lutra*, also *Leviticus* 62a. The priestly nature of Jesus is discussed in *The Name of God and the Image of the Lord*, pp. 50-183; Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, p. 166, n. 63. For Melchizedek as a high priest see A.D. van der Woude, "Melchizedek als himmlische Erlösungsvermittler," *Quintessentielle Studien* 14 (1965), pp. 354-73. *The Name of God and the Image of the Lord*, p. 183, p. 85, where Fossum notes that in later Jewish sources Melchizedek was identified with Michael. Akkenu's priestly activity appears in *Berakhot* 7a.

² See, Odeberg, 3 *Enoch*, p. 104. Alexander, "The Historical Setting of the Hebrew Book of Enoch," p. 12. Schenker, *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 49, writes "Metatron is described as some eighth in the *Shiur Qomah* as the celestial High Priest of the heavenly tabernacle—a function linked with his expression *mashkan ha-na'ar* in the *Tabernacle of the Youth*." 3. Metatron. It should be noted that Metatron's role as high priest in the heavenly tabernacle has been challenged by Martin Cohen in *The Shiur Qomah: Liturgy and Theurgy in Pre-Rabbinic Jewish Mysticism* (Lanham, 1983), p. 14, who writes "Metatron's function is more the heavenly choir-master than the celestial high priest."

³ J. Z. Smith, "The Temple and the Magician," *Map is Not Territory*, p. 187.

exegetical element).⁴⁶ Thus, Merkabah mysticism is characterized by purification/pilgrimage in the form of heavenly ascent, and identification with a divine man, in this case, Enoch-Metatron.

Although Metatron is an angelic being, he is also a species of divine man insofar as he represents a transformed or angelified human being: the biblical figure Enoch.⁴⁷ Esoteric speculation regarding Enoch was inspired by the Bible's laconic and mysterious account "Enoch walked with God: then he was no more for God took him" (Gen. 5:24). Apocalyptic sources contain a number of references to Enoch's heavenly apotheosis or angelification. In *I Enoch* 71, Enoch is addressed as the Son of Man, thereby implying that he has undergone a process of spiritual and/or physical transformation, perhaps even angelification or semi-divinization.⁴⁸ As Alan Segal writes, "This is an extraordinarily important event, as it underlines the importance of mystic transformation between the adept and the angelic vice-regent of God."⁴⁹ *II Enoch* 2, 8 explicitly describes the

⁴⁶ On the importance of exegesis in Merkabah mysticism, see *The Gnostic Imagination*, pp. 51-2.

⁴⁷ On the transformation of Enoch into Metatron cf., Moshe Idel, "Enoch is Metatron," pp. 146-51, and Charles Mopsik, *Le Livre hébreu d'Enoch ou Livre des secrets* (Paris 1909), pp. 5-20. Also, G. Scholem, *Jewish Mysticism*, p. 68. Metatron was also linked with other human figures, most notably Adam and Moses. Cf. Odeberg, *I Enoch*, "The Conceptions of Metatron in the Writings: Associating Metatron Particularly with Moses," pp. 106ff. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah* (Princeton 1987), 20. Cohen, *The Vision Quest*, pp. 136-43. Mopsik, *Le livre hébreu d'Enoch*, pp. 65-6. David Himmelfarb, *Ascension of the Gospel*, p. 126, writes: "These authors, I presume, saw the exalted Metatron as the primary figure, the ascending Moses as his junior replica. As historians of the tradition, however, we must reverse this relationship. First the Shalim presences and Moses invade heaven and lay hold of its entrance. Then the ascent of the *Hekhalot*, breaking the restraints of earlier stories, let Metatron enjoy the fruits of conquest."

⁴⁸ Cf. P. S. Alexander, *Commentary on The Hymnical Setting of the Hebrew Book of Enoch*, p. 98. There may be an identification between the Son of Man and the human Enochism through some kind of physical transformation. Matthew Black, "The Throne, Transfiguration, Prophetic Commission and the 'Son of Man': A Study in Tradition-History," in *Jews, Greeks and Christians: Religious Culture in Late Antiquity*, eds. Robert Hamerton-Kelly and Robin Scroggs, Leiden, 1976, p. 72, stresses the connection between Enoch and the Son of Man in *I Enoch* and Enoch's Metatron. Enoch Idel, *Enoch*, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, p. 15, writes: "There is no doubt that Enoch was extremely identified with the Son of Man, and his tradition was later developed in the figure of Metatron." *Enoch*, 63, p. 53. Collins hypothesizes that the identification of Enoch with the Son of Man may have been made in response to the Christian appropriation of the Son of Man as a title for Jesus. The identification would thereby be christological, use of the title and affirm that Enoch, sage of the heavenly mysteries, was the model to be followed, rather than Christ.

⁴⁹ Alan Segal, "The Risen Christ and the Angelic Mediator Figures in Light

transformation of Enoch as one which blurs the boundaries between human and angelic existence. 'And the Lord said to Michael Take Enoch and strip him of his earthly garments and anoint him with the holy oil, and clothe him in garments of glory. And Michael stripped me of my garments and anointed me with the holy oil. And I looked at myself, and I was as one of the glorious ones, and there was no difference. [emphasis added]'¹⁹

The specific connection between Enoch and Metatron is made in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to Genesis* 5:24 where it says of Enoch that "God called his name Metatron the Great Scribe, and in several passages of *3 Enoch*."²⁰ For example, in *3 Enoch* 4 Metatron declares

of Qumran. In *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. James Charlesworth, New York, 1992, p. 106. Cf. p. 304. Segal discusses the role of angelic transformation in a Qumran. On the phenomenon of Meskalah's speculation on Qumran, cf. Lawrence Schiffman, 'Meskalah's Speculation on Qumran: The 4Q Seraphim Sutra, Q11a, Shema, in *Mystic, Philosopher, and Politician Enoch in Jewish Intellectual History in Honor of Alexander Samama*, eds. Jerrold Rechter and Daniel Swetschinski, Durham, 1982.

¹⁹ See also the Ethiopic *Asmonean of Enoch* 1:9 where Enoch sees Enoch and all who were with him, stripped of their garments and clothed in the garments of the upper world, and they were like angels standing there in great glory.

²⁰ J. J. M. The *Book of Enoch*, *Hebrew Fragments of Qumran Cave 4*, p. 126 argues that the identification of Enoch and Metatron is a well-known fact in the Targum and an earlier dating of 1 Enoch was suggested by the Targum. In *Enoch and the Targum*, p. 192, cf. 11. M. J. Milik, however, does not view the context of its composition as indicating that all three books of Enoch are late compositions. Because of his late dating of 1 Enoch 32-7, late first century, and 1 Enoch 3-4 or early second century, a number of other reasons suggested or inferred in Jewish Hebrew traditions, etc.). Milik goes so far as to date 3 Enoch to the nineteenth century, a position he supports by using Scholem's work on the Kabbalah. On p. 127, Milik writes: "Moreover, recent research has shown the origin of the Cabala in Western Europe in the thirteenth century, and the greater part of the Jewish apocryphal and mystical literature contained in the Hebrew Kabbalah. Scholem's own position was that 3 Enoch was a fifth to sixth century composition, a Jewish tradition of 1 Enoch 9, a view he contrasted with Odeberg's dating (third century), because 'The author of his text [3 Enoch] interprets and rewrites some of the Kabbalah traditions that a third century writer could not have misunderstood.' Nevertheless, Scholem adds 'No trace of the material is old and important. Matthew Black, *The Throne-Mysticism: Prophetic Commission and the Son of Man*, p. 104, cf. J. J. Collins, *The Apocryphal Pseudepigrapha*, pp. 142-43 both explicitly reject Milik's late dating of the *Similitude of Enoch* (1 Enoch 3-7), arguing instead that the text is rather a first or second century composition. P. S. Alexander, '3 Hebrew Apocalypses of Enoch', pp. 22-23, outlines and then convincingly refutes Milik's argument for a late dating of 3 Enoch, pointing instead to fifth or sixth century CE date of composition. The redaction of Enoch as a scribe goes back to 1 Enoch 5 and Jubilees 4:3 where Enoch is conducted 'into the Garden of Eden, majesty and honor, and behind him he writes down the condemnation and judgment of the world, and all the wickedness of the children of men.'

declares "I am Enoch the son of Jared. When the generation of the Flood sinned and turned to evil deeds . . . the Holy One blessed be he took me from their midst to be a witness against them in the heavenly height. . . . And the Holy One blessed be he, appointed me in the height as a prince and a ruler among the ministering angels."

As a type of divine man, Metatron functions as the archetypal initiate and pilgrim as well as the model for angelification. Likewise as the heavenly high priest, Metatron serves as the mythological prototype of Merkabah mystics such as Rabin Ishmael. Metatron's role as a high priest highlights the functional parallel between the angelic vice-regent and the human mystic: both are priests, whereas his transformation from a human being into an angel reflects an ontological process which may be repeated by mystics via their own enthronement and angelification.²¹

Metatron signifies the resistance of some sources within the Merkabah genre to a binary ontology. Instead of a hard and fast division between human and angelic existence, Enoch-Metatron points to a more fluid ontological and functional continuum. Of course, it may be argued that the true division within Merkabah

²¹ For example, in 3 Enoch 2, where Metatron describes Ishmael as "of the family of Aaron, who the Holy One blessed be He . . . chose to minister in His presence and on whose head He imposed during the priestly service of Sinai. Although there is a tradition (Targum BT Ker. 1:36; BT H. B. 13a: 2) that R. Ishmael was of priestly origin, he could not have been the celestial high priest in Jerusalem as implied by BT Ber. 55a since he was only a high priest when the Temple was destroyed" (O. C. F. Murray Jones, "Transformational Mysticism in the Apocalyptic Merkabah Tradition," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 43 (1992), pp. 260-2), writes: "When taking part in the celestial liturgy, the adept acts as the representative of the people before God, as well as being commissioned to declare what has been revealed to him. In other words, he performs a function analogous to that of the High Priest of the Temple. A passage (Ber. 55a: 1-4) . . . and in some versions of Hekhalot Rabbati indicates that the adept, here typified by Metatron as Enoch, has taken over the priestly function of anointment. The high priest's function of Enoch in the heavenly Temple is asserted in *Jubilees* 4:15. For the explicit identification between Metatron as the heavenly high priest and R. Ishmael as his earthly counterpart, cf. 2 *Legends of the Martyrs*, "I have a servant ('ebed) on earth as you are my servant on high. His splendor corresponds to your splendor and his appearance corresponds to your appearance" (BH vi: 9-10). Cf. also, e.g., see Charles J. Eakin, p. 32, and elsewhere. The impact of Genesis 1:1-3 on the Creation of Merkabah Mysticism and the Shema Kameh, *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 1:2 (Hebrew), p. 92.

²² Elliot Wolfson has argued for a process of angelification in Merkabah mysticism. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, p. . . . the enthronement of the mystic in Hekhalot sources should be understood as a form of post-dedication or angelification in which the initiate achieves expression of apocalyptic literature concerning the transformation of individuals into angelic beings.

mysticism existed between God and all of his creatures, including angels. Even this model must be qualified in light of Metatron, however, who not only blurs the boundaries between human and angelic beings but, as I will show in the next section, between angelic and divine existence.

Metatron as Divine Angel

Along with his roles as heavenly high priest and angelified human being, Metatron was sometimes portrayed as a kind of second — albeit minor — deity.¹ The textual traditions which combined to create the image of Metatron as a "lesser YHWH" include biblical, apocalyptic, and Merkabah material. In a number of passages, the Bible refers to an Angel of the Lord or *matakh* YHWH who is sent by God into the world to act as his representative or emissary (cf. Judg. 13:3, Gen. 36:7). Perhaps the best known, and in terms of Metatron, the most important of these biblical references is Exodus 23:20-22:

I am sending an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. Pay heed to him [at his face] and obey him. Do not rebel against him for he will not pardon your offenses since My Name is in him. But if you obey him and do all that I say, I will be an enemy to your enemies and a foe to your foes.

The tradition of an angelic being who embodies the name of God continued within apocalyptic sources such as the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, a document which only survives in Slavonic but probably stems from the first or the beginning of the second century. In chapter ten of the work, Abraham's heavenly guide declares: "I am called Yahoel by Him who moves that which exists with me on the sev-

¹ Peter Hyman has argued that the Bible reflects a "dualistic pattern in which two divine entities are presupposed: one the supreme creator God, the other his viceroy or prime minister, or some other spiritual agency who really runs the show or at least promotes the point of contact between God and humanity." Peter Hyman, "Monotheism — A Misused Word in Jewish Studies?" *Journal of Jewish Studies* XLII (1991), p. 2. Hyman argues that most varieties of Judaism reflect this dualistic pattern, which itself is an outgrowth of old Canaanite patterns of Canaanite multipie divinities. In Hyman's opinion, the monotheistic theology of Deuteronomy reflects the views of a small party of priests and scribes whom Morton Smith, *Polemics, Politics and Peoples that Shaped the Old Testament* (London, 1981) called "The Yahweh Alone Party."

each expanse on the firmament a power in virtue of the ineffable name which is dwelling in me. This statement is followed by a description of Yahoel which draws on the anthropomorphic images of God in both Daniel 7:9 and Ezekiel 1:26-28: "the appearance of his [Yahoel's] body was like sapphire and the look of his countenance like chrysober, and the hair of his head like snow and the turban upon his head like the appearance of a rainbow".

There are a number of important parallels between Yahoel and Metatron.¹ Yahoel's relationship with Abraham in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is analogous to Metatron's relationship with R. Ishmael in the Hekhalot tract *3 Enoch*. Both figures serve as heavenly guides, protectors, and agents of revelation. Like Metatron, Yahoel is linked with the high priesthood in this case via the turban of Ex. 28:41 which Yahoel wears. Finally, as emphasized by Scholem, both Metatron and Yahoel were known by the epithet "The Lesser YHWH," a name which also found its way into Gnostic and Mandaean literature.²

The explicit identification of Metatron with the Angel of the Lord in Ex. 24 appears in *3 Enoch* 12 where Metatron declares that God "called me the Lesser YHWH in the presence of His heavenly household as it is written Ex. 23:2, 'For My name is in him'." From the available evidence it appears that Yahoel and Metatron developed separately but at some point Metatron absorbed the originally independent angel Yahoel.³ Indeed, in *3 Enoch* 48D1)

¹ *Apocalypse of Abraham*, in L. Rowland and Foxman have both noted the exegetical relations of YHWH in Daniel 7:9 and Ezekiel 1:26-28. Cf. *The Open Heaven*, p. 102; *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, pp. 318-321.

² On the resemblance between Metatron and Yahoel, cf. G.H. Box and J. I. Landsman, *The Apocalypse of Abraham* (London, 1918), p. xxv; H. Odberg, *3 Enoch*, pp. 99, 139, 144; G. Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 68; idem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 51, idem, "Metatron," in *Enc. Jud.* 11, p. 1444; J. Fossheim, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, pp. 318-321; P.S. Alexander, "The Historical Setting of the Hebrew Book of Enoch," p. 13.

³ Cf. *The Open Heaven*, p. 102, and *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, p. 320, where Fossheim writes, "That Yahoel is said to have a turban may be a sign of his high priestly function."

⁴ See Scholem's remarks in *Major Trends*, p. 68, "The name Yahoel is referred to in Jewish mystical literature as the 'lesser Yahoel,' a term which at the end of the second century was already made its way into non-Jewish gnostic literature, but which was also retained by the Merkabah mystics as the most exalted cognomen of Metatron." *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 51. "Thus, for example, it is obvious that the predication of Metatron as the Lesser Yahoel, which was taken over by the Christian Gnostics of the second century was based on the original speculation about the angel Yahoel."

⁵ As Alexander writes in "The Historical Setting of the Hebrew Book of Enoch," p. 16.

Metatron is actually called by the names Yahoel Yah and Yahoel.¹⁶ While the depiction of Metatron in 3 *Ezech* is well known, the Cairo Geniza preserves a manuscript fragment with an equally striking depiction of an angelic junior deity. Although the angel in the fragment is never explicitly identified as Metatron, its overall depiction and the explicit identification of the figure with the Angel of the Lord in Ex 23 indicate that the intended subject is Metatron, a conclusion also reached by Schäfer in his preliminary analysis of the fragment, as he writes: "Hier kann nur Metatron gemeint sein."¹⁷

1a

- 1 And the earth is illuminated from his glory and from his light the sun, the moon
- 2 and the stars are brightened and illuminated And God appointed him,
- 3 his angel lord of all the creatures And He set him to rule over the upper
- 4 and the lower [beings], to conduct them and to guide them at their head. And all
- 5 praise, sanctify, proclaim the power of, and declare 'Holy, Holy, Holy'¹⁸ and 'Blessed is the Glory
- 6 of the Lord in His place. "And this angel" praises among them. And this [angel] is whom
- 7 the Holy One blessed be He appointed over Israel, saying to Moses 'Lo, I am sending
- 8 an angel before you, etc.'¹⁹ Obey him and heed his voice, do not disobey him, etc.'

¹⁶ The parallels are so acute that Jan Peeters has said that "It is obvious that Yahoel is the prototype of Metatron" is hardly an understatement. See *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, p. 321.

¹⁷ Photographs reproductions of the manuscript, preliminary reconstructions of problematic sections, and skeletal notes are provided by Peter Schäfer in *Geniza-Fragmente zur Hebräer Literatur* (Tübingen, 1984) pp. 3, 154 [C], 155, K2 [95f].

¹⁸ See Schäfer, *Geniza*, "11.6 Kommentar," p. 134.

¹⁹ Isaiah 6:3.

²⁰ Ezekiel 3:12.

²¹ Schäfer, *Geniza*, "11.6 Kommentar," p. 134 notes that "Der über Israel gesetzte Engel ist offenbar Metatron nicht Michael."

²² Exodus 23:2, 21.

²³ Exodus 23:2. Here the reference is clearly Metatron. See the interpretation of this verse in BT Sanhedrin 38b.

- 9 'But if you indeed heed his voice and do all that I say, etc.'²⁸
 10 He called the name of this angel by the name of his Creator.²⁹ As it is written, 'For My name is in him'.³⁰
 11 And He made his authority like His own authority and his decree like [His own] decree [the rest of one eleven and line twelve are difficult to reconstruct]
 12 [?]
 13 and he does not have a share in the world to come
 And proof of our words
 14 that He gave him authority to decree decrees and the Holy One blessed be He establishes [them is] that
 15 the verse said: "But if you indeed heed his voice and do
 16 all that I say, etc." and did not say: all that he said." From here
 17 we learn that he makes a decree and his Creator establishes [it]. Said
 18 R. Ishmael, "The Prince of the Countenance whose name is Metatron told me."

This text is followed by a *Shur Qomah* passage which appears to treat the Holy One blessed be He as the name of a lower divine figure, one separate from the Creator. "R. Ishmael said: 'The Prince of the Presence, whose name is Metatron, said to me, 'What is the measure of the Holy One blessed be He who is called by the name of his Creator?'" (a. 17.b.1). Next comes a description of the divine anthropos which one finds in other *Shur Qomah* texts, complete with measurements of various body parts. As it stands, the formulation implies that the Holy One blessed be He is a lower being who possesses the same name as its creator — presumably God. This is problematic, of course, since in other sources the Holy One blessed be He is invariably a name for God and the being who possesses the same name as its creator is Metatron.

How to make sense of this text? Perhaps the scribe intended to write the following: "R. Ishmael said: 'The Prince of the Presence, whose name is Metatron, who is called by the name of his Creator, said to me: "What is the measure of the Holy One blessed be He?"'

²⁸ Exodus 23:22

²⁹ Here, Schafer, *Geniza*, "11.6 Kommentar," p. 134, writes, "Hier kann nur Metatron gemeint sein."

³⁰ Exodus 23:2

Instead, the scribe may have mistakenly switched two of the phrases to produce the version in the Genizah. It is also possible that the scribe actually viewed the Holy One blessed be He as a separate entity from the Creator of the world and the proper subject of the *Shiur Qomah*.¹

The situation is made even more confusing by the passage which follows this *Shiur Qomah* description. This text depicts a cosmic judge and weigher of souls. The identity of this figure is unclear because the text describes him in imagery that could indicate God or a supra-angelic being such as Metatron.

2a

- 1 The goings and comings of the souls of people
- 2 is held in his hand and he completes the work of the great princes
- 3 who are appointed over the entrances of the watches of God
- 4 And he lifts [or takes] them by his hand, the same souls, and
- 5 the same completed book and they go and give them
- 6 to the guardians [or, 'angels'] and the holy ones greater than
- 7 them. And the guardians and holy ones"
- 8 go and transfer them to the seventy one great princes
- 9 appointed at the right entrance to God,
- 10 which is where the great court is located and these seventy one
- 11 great and glorified princes, the arrangers of the orders of the
- 12 great court are with them and the one who judges the world" sits
- 13 in the heights
- 14 in a bright residence over the wheels of devouring fire
- 15 and over flaming cherubs and on great beasts and on wheels of
- 16 brightness."
- 17 And from the light over his throne of judgement his countenance
- 18 is brightened
- 19 Seventy two dwellings" surround him
- 20 like the appearance of great light, like the appearance of great
- 21 brightness.

¹ My thanks to Elliot Wolfson with whom I discussed these Genizah texts.

² In §44 = *Enoch* 28 these cherubs are appointed to the four great princes who stand before the throne in glory. Also see Daniel 4:10 for the biblical source of the cherubs.

³ Cf. parallel in §45 (=3 *Enoch* 28).

⁴ This description is based on Ezekiel 1.

⁵ The term *ma'onot*, 'sing. *ma'on*' is often associated with the Temple of Jastrow p. 814; and is also a name of one of the heavens in BT Hag. 12b. As Schafer

17 And the least among them is like the appearance of the sun's brightness

18 And above and below and all the world in its entirety suspend[s]^a on his arm.¹

III

1 Like an amulet which hangs on an arm, as it is said, "And under

2 [his] arms the world, etc."^b [] And all the deeds of human beings are engraved

3 on his *Pargod*," whether the past or the future, whether the complete

4 or the not complete. And the prince about whom they say, 'he moves the sea'

5 views their deeds in a single glance and examines

6 and determines their judgments and establishes them on the truth, as it is said, "Look at your

7 path in the valley, know what you have done"^c And it says, And the Lord [Adonai]

8 is truly God. Elohim, he is a living God and king of the world etc."^d

notes Gen 1 p. 14, v. 2a/15), the term *me'olah* appears in several Hekhalot passages, although the number seven, not seventy one, is associated with it. Cf. §743, §77 §84 §406. See also Deuteronomy 33:27, where the form *me'olah* is used in connection with the image of the supporting arm of the Lord, which we will see in Gen. R. 26a, where the verse is actually cited. Finally the well attested Jewish and Gnostic tradition of the seventy two divine forms must be mentioned.^e Since the plural form is used, Schafer (*Gen. R. 26a*) has correctly noted that the true singular subject (the word) is not being modified but rather the plural residences.

The term appears in §§84 804 967 and 743, where it (more specifically God's right arm) is explicitly linked to the image of the "dwellings."

^b Deut. 33:2. The use of this verse may allude to the more complex issue of the measure of God's body in the *Shema Qomah* literature. See Deuteronomy 355 the verse Deut. 33:26. "O Jeshurun, there is none like God, riding through the heavens to help you through does in His majesty." is cited as a proof text in what appears to be a rabbinic exposition of the *Shema Qomah* doctrine. Cf. Michael Fishbane, "The Measure of God's Glory."

^c See Baraiah ii §64 §930ff. = 3 Enoch 45.

^d In §486 is a God who "moves the sea" although a Hiphil form is employed, rather than the *Qal* form as in the present context. See Schafer, Geniza, p. 134, n. 2-4.

^e Jeremiah 2:23

^f Jeremiah 10:10

- 9 Adonai is the attribute [*Middah*] of mercy and Elohim is the attribute
 10 of justice.⁹ Truth is the place of the Shekinah who estab-
 lishes
 11 all creatures [Lit. "who enter the world"] in truth. And
 when he sits
 12 on the throne of judgment righteousness stands at his right
 and mercy
 13 stands at his left and truth stands before him,¹⁰ as it is said,
 14 "righteousness and justice are the base of your throne;
 grace and truth stand
 15 before you."¹¹ And scales of <righteousness>¹² truth rest
 16 before him and the book of the account of the world¹³ are
 opened¹⁴ before him and he
 17 is a witness¹⁵ and makes known the deeds of everyone. And
 all thoughts
 18 of the heart are revealed to him¹⁶ as it is said, "I the Lord
 probe the heart, examine
 19 the kidneys and heart [fig. the mind] to repay each per-
 son according to his ways like a fruit of his deeds."¹⁷

⁹ See B1 Berakhot 7a and *Seder* § 1 where these two attributes are identi-
 fied with Akatnei. Cf. also, Schäfer, *Gemz.* p. 134, n. 26/9-11.

See parallel in §48 (= 3 Enoch 9).

Psalm 89 15

¹⁰ The word has been specially marked by the scribe (see Schäfer, *Gemz.* p. 135,
 2b. It is unclear why.

¹¹ The phrase *sefer mitsvot ha'olam* is "the book of the accounts of the world" is par-
 alleled by the phrase *sefer ha'asot me'et ha'olam* which is "the book in which are
 written all the deeds of the world" in §47 (= 3 Enoch 30). In §47 this book is asso-
 ciated with a prooftext from Daniel 7:10, "The judgment was set and the books
 were opened." Either the plural *mitzvot* of Schäfer §47 or the plural *asot* of Daniel
 7:10, may have influenced the plural modifier which follows in our text, i.e. "are
 opened" rather than the grammatically correct "is open".

¹² The text gives a plural form although the sense is singular (see n. 167 above).

¹³ In §72 (= 3 Enoch 48) Metatron is called *gomer* and is "witness". See Schäfer,
Gemz. p. 14 n. 21/12 where he writes "Die Funktion des *gomer* und *kenise* auf
 Metatron verweisen".

¹⁴ A close parallel to the phrase "And all the thoughts of the heart are revealed
 to him" is found in §11 (= 3 Enoch 1) where the phrase "and all the thoughts of
 the hearts of living beings" are revealed to me as they are revealed before the
 Creator. *Yisrael Ben-Zion*. Concerning this parallel Schäfer writes, *Vg.* § 4. 3
 Henoch = dies von Henoch. Metatron Augustin ist Henoch nicht ganz klar
 ob Gott oder Metatron gemeint ist. Cf. Schäfer, *Gemz.* p. 134 n. 2b/12.

¹⁷ Jeremiah 17:10.

Section 2a describes the ascent of the souls to the heavenly court. As the souls ascend, they are passed along to different sets of holy beings, until they arrive at the 'great house' where they are judged by the 'one who judges the world'. The final line 18 describes how the entire world hangs on his, the judge of the world's arm. This image forms a segue into the next section 2b which begins with an account of how the souls are actually judged. Much of the imagery and terminology in section 2b appears in other Hekhalot passages where the subject is clearly God. In this passage, however, these images and terms appear with other motifs generally associated with Metatron, making it extremely difficult to determine whether God or His angelic vice regent is the subject of the description.

Line 4 introduces the first ambiguity for a "prince" who is described as 'moving the sea' perceives the deeds of the souls 'in a single glance and examines and determines their judgments and establishes them on the truth'. If the subject were God, it seems extremely unlikely that the term 'prince' or *sar* would be employed. Nevertheless, the epithet 'who moves the sea' is applied to God in another Hekhalot passage. The description of how this prince is able to instantly apprehend human deeds, appropriately characterizes either God, or Metatron, who in *3 Enoch* 11, is granted the omniscient knowledge of human deeds described here.

Lines 7-15 depict an enthroned figure of judgement, with the hypostatic attributes of justice/righteousness at his right, mercy at his left and truth before him. Although these attributes are generally associated with God, BT Berakhot 7a and *Synopse* §151, apply them to 'Akatriel Yah Lord of Hosa,' who may be an angelic vice regent figure in these passages. It is also significant that Elolam and Adonai are equated with the hypostatic figures of justice and mercy respectively, since these are names of God. The confusion over the subject of the description is heightened by three features which appear in lines 15-8. First, in line 15 we find the image of the scales which is associated in *3 Enoch* with the angelic being Shagad Hoza who is identified with Metatron, in other passages. Second, in line 17, the enthroned figure is called a 'witness' and an epithet associated with Metatron in *3 Enoch* 48a. Finally, in the same line, the phrase 'And all thoughts of the heart are revealed to him' is applied to the figure, a phrase which parallels the description of Metatron in *3 Enoch* 11 "and all the thoughts of the hearts of living beings are revealed to me".

These Getizah passages point to an extremely close link between God and the angelic vice regent, even to the degree that it may be

difficult to identify which one is the subject of a particular description. The situation becomes even more cloudy when we turn to the question of God's anthropomorphic form and its relationship to the chief angel. The possibility that the Angel of the Lord actually embodies God is already present in the Bible and, as several scholars have shown, emerges in apocalyptic writings as well.⁴⁰ The nature of God's hypostatic form or *shmur Qomah* in Merkabah sources has been widely debated. In an earlier work, I discussed this debate, focusing in particular on the complex position of Gershom Scholem.⁴¹ I concluded my discussion by affirming Gedaliahu Stroumsa's suggestion that an ancient, perhaps even the original, version of the *Shmur Qomah* tradition understood the subject of the descriptions to be a Name-bearing angel, most likely Metatron.⁴² In addition to the link between Metatron and the *Shmur Qomah*, it also appears that some sources understood Metatron to be the hypostatic embodiment of a particular part of the divine form, most notably the face of God. As I have argued elsewhere, it is likely that this tradition underlies the title *sar ha-panim*, which is associated with Metatron. Rather than "prince of the face [of God]", this title is better understood as "prince who is the face [of God]."⁴³ Indeed, at least one Merkabah passage explicitly identifies Metatron as the hypostatic face of God:

Moses said to the Lord of all the worlds: "If your face does not go [with us] do not bring me up from here." [Ex. 33:14] The Lord of all the worlds warned Moses that he should beware of that face of his. So it is written: "Beware of his face." [Ex. 23:21] This is he who is written with the one letter by which heaven and earth were created, and was sealed with the seal of "I am that I am." [Ex. 3:14] This is the prince who is called Yofie, Yah-daniel—he is called Metatron. §§396-397⁴⁴

In addition to the connection between Metatron and God's face, this passage also expresses a link between Metatron and the "one letter

⁴⁰ Christopher Rowland, "The Visions of God in Apocalyptic Literature," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 10 (1979) pp. 131-54. Cf. also *The Open Heaven*, pp. 90ff.; Jarl Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, pp. 133-134.

⁴¹ See *The Gnostic Imagination*, pp. 80-99.

⁴² G. Stroumsa, "Form of God."

⁴³ See *The Gnostic Imagination*, pp. 99-105.

⁴⁴ Halpern, *The Face of the Angel*, p. 208, writes "It seems to identify this being with the 'face of God' mentioned in Exodus 23:15, and with the angel of whom God says (in Exodus 23:2) that my name is in him; that is, it represents him as a manifestation of God."

by which heaven and earth were created" This phrase echoes a series of descriptions in *3 Enoch* which imply that Metatron may have been understood as a demiurgic figure by some Merkabah mystics. In *3 Enoch* 11 Metatron declares that "all mysteries of Torah and all secrets of wisdom, and all depths of purity and all thoughts of the hearts of living creatures, and all secrets of the world, and all the secrets of Creation are revealed before me as they are revealed before the Creator [*yosar bereshit*]." In chapter 12, God clothes Metatron in a garment of glory, crowns him, and calls him 'the Lesser YHWH' or *Yahweh Ha Qatan*. In chapter 13 Metatron states that out of the 'great love and mercy with which the Holy One, blessed be He, loved and adored me more than all the children of heavens' He wrote with his finger with a flaming style upon the crown on my head the letters by which the heavens and earth were created.

Despite the link between Metatron and the 'secrets of creation,' *3 Enoch* still maintains a distinction between Metatron and the *Yosar Bereshit* or Creator. The question of whether Jewish sources identify a figure other than God as the creator of the world has long been a thorny one since the existence of a demiurge is one of the defining features of Gnosticism and is traditionally viewed as one of the chief ways in which Gnostic movements diverged from late antique Judaism and Christianity. A number of scholars have suggested that the portrayal of Metatron in *3 Enoch*, while not demiurgic, per se, reveals 'the matrix of ideas out of which the Gnostic concept of the demiurge has risen.'⁵⁷ Other scholars have gone one step further by attempting to reconstruct a no longer extant Jewish tradition which attributed demiurgic function to an angelic figure such as Metatron.⁵⁸ Thus, in Stroumsa's view: "It was Jewish speculation about the cos-

⁵⁷ Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, p. 70. Fossum bases his observation on the more general argument of Gailen Quispel, "The Demiurge in the Apocrypha," of 1955, in *Agg. Hymns and Canon. Paper Read at the 1st International Congress on Apocrypha, Cambridge, December 1-4*, ed. R. McL. Wilson (Leiden, 1958), 228-33. A primary development within Judaism - awareness of God's transcendence, embarrassment about the crude anthropomorphism of the Old Testament - created a situation where it became feasible to identify the Angel of the Lord with this demiurge.

⁵⁸ Saul Lieberman, "How Much Greek in Jewish Palestine?" in Alexander A. Mann, ed., *Hebrew and Other Studies* (Cambridge, 1943), p. 14, cites a rabbinic tradition in *Midrash de R. Nathan* ch. XXXIX, cc. Schechter, page 16, which links the creation of the world with the "likeness on high." Because of his sin is not granted to man to know what likeness is on high, and but for that, the keys would have been handed to him and he might have known what heaven and earth were created with.

the size of the demargic angel the hypostatic form of God, that both Christians and Gnostics adopted and transformed"⁴⁶

The following passage from the Merkabah text *Re'uyot Yehizket* "The Visions of Ezekiel" not only uses Metatron's name to the "name of the creator of the world," it also depicts him as the *atq yomin* or Ancient of Days from Daniel 7:9-10:

What is a Zebud? R. Levi quoted R. Hama b. 'Uqba, quoting R. Johanan: The prince dwells only in Zebud, and it is he who constitutes the sadness of Zebud. Thousands of thousands and myriads of myriads are in his presence serving him. Daniel says of them:

While I was watching, thrones, and so forth. A river of fire flowed. [Daniel 7:9-10] What is his name? Qmris is his name.

R. Isaac says Metatron is his name. R. Anan b. Sasson says Bzebul is his name. R. Tanhumi the elder says: myb is his name. Eleazar of Narbonne says: Metatron, like the name of the Power.

Those who make use of the name say: this is his name qmris, this is his name, similar to the name of the creator of the world.

The identification of Metatron with the Ancient of Days is provocative for two reasons. First, in Daniel 7:9-10, the Ancient of Days

⁴⁶ Stroumsa, "Form(s) of God," pp. 287-288. Joseph Dan, "Anafiel, Metatron and the Creator," *Tarbiz* 52, 1983 (Hebrew), p. 457 has argued that a "single role was ascribed to the angelic figure Anafiel and that Metatron and Anafiel may have originally been 'a single entity, which was differentiated only at the moment when he assumed the epiphany aspect.' Anafiel was, since he 'sage' of Metatron, said to be the one who presided over the world with a 're-existence' of the world. It is significant that Anafiel, like Metatron, is described as 'a servant who is named after his master.' (Genesis 18:12) Metatron is mentioned at the 'gate of the seven heavens' (p. 41) where he guides the 'pasha' to the vision of the 'King in His beauty' (p. 40). Metatron is explicitly depicted as the demargic or the 're-existence' of Abraham in Abraham b. Ezra and Abraham b. David of Pumbedra. R. Abba. See Ephraim Wollman, "Could He Demargic and the 're-existence' of the 'King of the World' in Abraham b. Ezra," *Revue des études juives* 149, 1990, esp. pp. 93-101.

⁴⁷ It should be noted that in at least one of the *Shur Qomah* passages, God, rather than Metatron, is explicitly referred to as the Ancient of Days (*atq yomin*), cf. Martin Cohen, *The Shur Qomah: Texts and Revelations*, Tübingen, 1985, p. 116, line 392. In 2 Enoch 21:10 God, i.e. the 'Holy One' is described as sitting in judgment and "the law of his head is as fire with a clear vision of the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7: white cloth 55. Daniel is seated in reference to the Holy One blessed be He." *The Visions of Ezekiel*, ed. I. Gruenwald in *Temple* (Jerusalem, 1972), pp. 128ff.

⁴⁸ lines 71ff. Cf. Hapgood, *Enoch*, pp. 265ff. for an English translation and examination of the manuscript traditions and dating. Gruenwald, *Apocalypse and Merkabah Mysticism*, p. 40, writes: "one might rightly ask whether the author of *Re'uyot Yehizket* did not think that the *atq yomin* described in Ex. Book 1:12 was identical with the *atq yomin* of the Heaven. Now, admittedly the identification was explicitly made, but one may assume that it could have been implied." Peter Hayman, "Monotheism — A Misused Word in Jewish Studies," p. 12 is more confident, "In the Visions of Ezekiel, one of the earliest of the Merkabah texts Metatron is seated at the third heaven and is identified as the Ancient of Days of Daniel 7."

appears to be a title for God and not a subordinate being. Second, in addition to the Ancient of Days, Metatron bears a resemblance to the Son of Man of Daniel 7:13-14. Ancient evidence for the conflation of the two figures in Daniel 7 comes from LXX Daniel 7:13, where instead of reading the Son of Man "came unto [heo] the Ancient of Days," the text reads "came as [heo] the Ancient of Days."² Commenting on this passage Rowland writes "This variant suggests that the Son of Man is in fact the embodiment of the person of the Ancient of Days. In other words the original scene in Daniel 7, where two figures exist alongside each other in heaven, is changed so that the vice-regent, the Son of Man, takes upon himself the form and character of God himself."

The conflation of the Ancient of Days and the Son of Man into a single figure recalls the widespread rabbinic tradition that God appears as both an old man and a youth.³ In BT Hag. 14a, R. Samuel ben Nahman depicts God as both the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7:9 and the youth in Song of Songs 5:11. Other rabbinic passages portray God as an old man full of mercy at Sinai (*zaqen male' rahaman*), and a young warrior at the Sea of Reeds.⁴ Gedaliahu Stroumsa has shown that Metatron embodies a similar "two-fold polymorphy."⁵ The most striking evidence for this parallel between God and Metatron appears in BT Yebamoth 16b, where in another tradition attributed to R. Samuel ben Nahman, the *Sar Ha Olam* or "Prince of the World" (another title for Metatron) declares "I have been young, but now I am old." (Ps. 37:25)⁶

² Frank Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge: London, 1973) pp. 16-7, argues that the Son of Man is "exactly the young Ba' [respected and deified] by the apocalyptic as the Jewish nation," whereas the Ancient of Days echoes the figure of El.

³ Cf. *Two Powers in Heaven*, p. 202; *The Open Heaven*, p. 98; *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, p. 319.

⁴ *The Open Heaven*, ibid. See also *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, pp. 312-313, n. 139, where Fossum notes the parallel between the LXX passage and BT Yeb. 16b, since both describe the second power in heaven as a youth and an old man.

⁵ Gedaliahu Stroumsa, "Polymorphie divine et transformations d'un mythologique, *L'Apocryphe de Jean et ses sources*, in *Sacré et Saint. Essais de l'antiquité tardive*, Paris, 1992.

⁶ For example, in *Mekhilta de R. Shimon bar Yohai*, Beshalah 15, in eds., J. N. Epstein and E. Z. Melamed, Jerusalem, 1955, p. 81.

The term Stroumsa employs when he describes the phenomenon of Metatron as old man and youth in "Forms of God," p. 281.

⁷ Stroumsa identifies Metatron with the "Prince of the World." Stroumsa notes that further evidence for the depiction of Metatron as a youth and an old man

The significance of these traditions lies in their shared ability to undermine boundaries between human, angelic and divine beings. As both an angelified human being and a lesser Yahweh, Metatron stands midway between God and humanity. Rather than affirming an unbreachable god in these texts, the angelic vice regent functions as an embodied atun, whose janus like character symbolizes the ability to move from one state of existence to another. As David Halperin has written concerning the connection of Metatron and Moses: "As Metatron is a 'lesser Yahweh,' so he is a 'greater' Moses."¹⁴

comes from Abraham Abulafia's *Hayyim He-'Olam He-Ba* and from parallels with Jesus, cf. below

¹⁴ David Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, p. 426

CHAPTER FOUR

THE FALL OF METATRON

This chapter will focus on the evidence for an internal polemic within rabbinic and Hekhalot texts against the angelic vice regent. The polemic focuses on the figure of Metatron although one of the texts I will examine mentions the figure Akairiel rather than Metatron and is exceptional in other ways as well. These texts reflect an uneasiness with the ascent and angelification of human beings, on the one hand, and the depiction of the angelic vice regent as a second — albeit lesser — deity on the other. They polemize against these related traditions by creating a worst case scenario: a mystic ascends to heaven where instead of seeing God and undergoing a process of angelification, he mistakenly sees the chief angel as a second deity and is transformed into an arch-heretic. In other Merkabah texts, vision is intimately linked to the mystic's angelification (as Elliot Wolfson has shown). In these passages, vision is the source of heresy. Thus, along with the angelification of the mystic and the God-like appearance of the angelic vice regent, these texts also problematize the visionary focus of much of Merkabah mysticism.

In the passages I have discussed thus far, Metatron serves as the chief symbol for the continuum between human beings, angels, and God. The following passages employ Metatron for a contrary purpose to highlight the hierarchical relationship between different categories of beings. The transformation of *Ishta oer Aotya* into *Aher* — a name which means "alien" or "other" — may be read as an opposite process to the angelification or deification of successful Merkabah mystics in other texts. His failure results in a complete separation or alienation from God, as the heavenly voice calls out, "Return backsliding children — except for Aher!" The reification of boundaries, therefore, rather than their crossing, is the goal of these passages.

Having said this, it is important to note that not all of these passages are equally critical regarding the angelic vice regent or the Merkabah mystic. Indeed, at least one of the texts I will examine actually defends both the mystic and the angelic vice regent in this case Akairiel, although in other ways the text seems to belong to what I will call the Aher/Metatron tradition. At the other end of

the spectrum stands the Babylonian Talmud's version of Aher's encounter with Metatron which in my opinion contains the strongest potential. Determining the relationship between what appear to be different—sometimes very different—versions of the same textual tradition is one of my goals. In doing so, I hope to show that the line between rabbinic and Hekhalot literature is sometimes difficult to discern. Finally, I seek to understand the relationship between this polemical tradition and the more positive depictions of the angelic vice regent. Did the former function as a kind of warning label attached to Merkabah traditions in order to make sure that the line between God and his creatures was not completely erased? Did it represent another school within the mystical tradition or even the voice of certain opponents of Merkabah mysticism which were nevertheless preserved by the editors of the mystical texts, themselves?

The danger that some devotees might actually worship Metatron in place of God is clear from a *beraita* in B1 Sanh. 38b:

Once a man said to R. Idi'ah: It is written: "And unto Moses He said, 'Come up to YHWH'" (Exodus 24:1). Surely it should have said: "Come up to Me!"

This was Metatron, he replied, whose name is like that of his Master, for it is written: "For My Name is in him" (Exodus 23:21). But, if so, we should worship him!

R. Idi'ah replied: The same verse, however, says: "Do not rebel against him" (This means: Do not exchange him for Me [reading *al lomar* (do not exchange) for *al lomar* (do not rebel)]).

But if so, why is it stated: "He will not pardon your transgressions" (we etc., above)?

He answered: Indeed, we would not accept him even as a messenger, for it is written: "If Your Presence go not with us" (Exodus 23:15).

A similar danger underlies a more famous rabbinic episode: Aher's heavenly encounter with Metatron. The talmudic context of this tradition is the story of the four rabbis who entered Pardes. Although the episode occurs in only one talmudic passage—B1 Hagigah 15a:

For a detailed discussion of this passage, cf. Alan Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven* pp. 68-69.

Studies on the Pardes account have included, although this is by no means an exhaustive list) those of Hermann Graetz, *Gesammelte und Judentum* (Kernschmitt, 1846, who read the Pardes account as a rabbinic expression of the Gnosticism of the Gnostics; in reverse, Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* pp. 52-53 and *Jewish Gnosticism* pp. 14-19 who viewed rabbinic and Hekhalot Pardes accounts as related descriptions of heavenly ascent; Ephraim E. Urbach, *Ha-Mesoret al Torah ha-Nod be-Torah ha-Tanaitim*, in *Ephraim E. Urbach, R. J. Zvi Werblowsky and Chaim Wirshko, eds., Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to Gershom G. Scholem*

several versions are preserved in the Hekhalot literature. In addition as P. S. Alexander has shown different talmudic manuscripts indicate the existence of at least two recensions of the talmudic account. By comparatively discussing all versions of the Aher/Metatron tradition for the first time I hope to reconstruct their chronological and thematic relationship.

I begin my analysis of the humbling or dethronement of Metatron with an examination of the talmudic manuscripts translated and discussed by Alexander:¹

1. The *editio princeps* of Bomberg, which save for minor variations, - Vilna folios, the standard edition

A. 'Aher cut down the plans

B. Of him Scripture says: 'Do not allow your mouth to bring your flesh into guilt' (Eccl. 5:5)

C. What does this mean?

D. He saw Metatron to whom permission was given to sit and write down the merits of Israel

E. He said: 'It is taught that on high there is no sitting, no rivalry, no neck.... and no weariness.

F. Perhaps' - God forbid! - 'there are two powers.'

G. They led forth Metatron and whipped him with sixty lashes of fire

H. They said to him: 'Why did you not stand up when you saw him?'

I. Permission was given to him to erase the merits of Aher

J. A Heavenly voice went forth and said: 'Return, backsliding children' (Jer. 3:22) - except Aher!'

on the Seventieth Birthday by Pope, Colloquies and Friends, Jerusalem 1967, pp. 12-7, who read the Papias tradition as an allegory constructed around a *mysterium tremendum*, namely a vision of the Merkavah. David Halperin, *The Merkavah in Rabbinic Literature* (New Haven 1981), pp. 13ff. who accepts Ulla's sadagogical reading, and denies an ecstatic vision of the Merkavah at the core of the tradition, asserting, instead, that only in the Babylonian Talmud was the *Pardees* account re-interpreted as a recent Peter Schäfer, 'New Testament and Hekhalot Literature: The Journey to Heaven in Paul and the Merkavah Mysticism', *Journal of Jewish Studies* 35, 1984, pp. 9-35, where Schäfer sharply criticizes Scholem's position and interprets the *Pardees* accounts as the struggle of competing rabbinic schools, and Henry Fischel, *Rabbinic Literature and Greco-Roman Philosophy: A Study of Epiphany and Rhetoric in Early Midrashic Writings* (Leiden, 1973), who interprets the *Pardees* in terms of Greek philosophical traditions.

¹ P. S. Alexander, '3 Enoch and the Talmud,' *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 18, 1987.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 54, 59, 61. Alexander's rendering of these passages is also included by

2. Vancanus 134 [differences from Bomberg are indicated by italics]

A. 'Aher cut down the plants.

B Of him Scripture says 'Do not allow your mouth to bring your flesh into guilt. *nor say before the angel that it was a mistake* Ecc 5:5.

C. *What did he see?*

D He saw that permission was given to Metatron to sit for one hour in the day to write down the merits of Israel.

E. He said: 'It was taught that on high there is *no standing* and *no sitting* *no jealousy* and *no rivalry*, *no neck* and *no weariness*

F Perhaps' God forbid there are two powers *here*

G They led forth Metatron and whipped him with sixty lashes of fire

H

I Permission was give to him, to Metatron, to *uproot* the merits of Aher

J A heavenly voice went forth *from behind the Curtain* and said 'Return, backsliding children — except Aher!'"

3. Munich 95 [differences from Bomberg in italics]

A. 'Aher cut down the plants

B Of him Scripture says 'Do not allow your mouth to bring your flesh into guilt, *nor say before the angel that it was a mistake* Ecc 5:5'

C. *What did he see?*

D. [He saw] Metatron to whom permission was given to write down the merits of Israel

E He said 'It was taught that on high there is *no standing* and *no sitting*, *no jealousy* and *no rivalry* *no neck* and *no weariness*

F. Perhaps' — God forbid! — 'there are two powers'

G They led forth Metatron and whipped him with sixty lashes of fire

H

I Permission was given to him, to Metatron, to *uproot* the merits of Aher

J A heavenly voice went forth from behind the Curtain and said 'Return backsliding children — except Aher?'"

According to Alexander, the crux of the differences between the accounts lies in their attitudes toward sitting. He notes that Munich 95 gives no indication that Metatron's sin was specifically *sitting* in the presence of Aher. Indeed, section E declares that "It was taught that on high there is no standing and no sitting," in other words, sitting is not identified as being more problematic than standing. Like Munich 95, Vaticanus 134, section E prohibits both sitting and standing in heaven. However, Vaticanus 134, section D adds that Aher saw that Metatron was given permission to sit for one hour in the day,¹ thereby implying that Metatron's sitting inspired Aher's heresy. While Vaticanus 134 restricts Metatron's sitting to one hour a day, Bomberg, section D simply states that Metatron was given permission to sit. Furthermore, Bomberg adds a section absent from the other manuscripts, in which Metatron is condemned for not standing up when he saw Aher (section H). Finally, Bomberg, section E lacks the reference to standing which is present in the other manuscripts and reads: "It is taught that on high there is no sitting, no rivalry."

Alexander accounts for the differences between the manuscripts by arguing that Munich 95 represents the earliest recension of the account, while Vaticanus 134 represents a later recension, and Bomberg the latest. This reconstruction is largely based on Alexander's evaluation of section E of the manuscripts. As mentioned above, Munich 95 and Vaticanus 134 both declare that there is no sitting and standing on high, while Bomberg lacks the reference to standing. According to Alexander, not only does the presence of the word standing create "a more balanced, rhythmic form" in the Hebrew original, but it indicates the text's diffusion, since it creates a contradiction in Vaticanus 134, namely, if there is "no standing and no sitting" in heaven, how come Metatron is given permission to sit for one hour a day?² It seems unlikely that Vaticanus 134 would have introduced such a complication to the formulation preserved in Bomberg, i.e. without the reference to standing. Therefore, the original version of the quotation must have included both standing and sitting.

Thus, the emphasis on sitting in Vaticanus 134, and to a much greater degree in Bomberg, reflects an attempt to clarify the cause

¹ The emphasis on sitting may have been inspired by the tradition that angels do not have joints, cf. *Ezekiel* 1: "their legs were straight legs"; *Genesis Rabbah* 65:2; PT Berakhot 11; *Leviticus Rabbah* 6:4, etc.

² 3 Enoch and the Talmud, p. 60.

of Metatron's undoing, something which is unclear from Munich 95. Probably aware of the tradition that angels cannot sit because they lack joints, the authors of Vancanus 134 and Bomberg focused on the motif of sitting in the quotation in section F. Bomberg represents the latest stage of the tradition since it cleans up the quotation in section F, by eliminating the apparent contradiction preserved in Vancanus 134.

Having reconstructed the sequence of the talmudic recensions, Alexander turns his attention to the relationship between the talmudic accounts and the version of Metatron's downfall in 3 Enoch 16.

3 Enoch 16:1-5 (Synopsis §20):

Rabbi Ishmael said: "Metatron, the Prince of Countenance, the splendor of the highest heaven, said to me
At first I was sitting on a throne of glory at the entrance to the seventh hekhal, and I judged all the denizens of the heights, the luminaria of God, on the authority of the Holy One blessed be he. I distributed greatness, royalty, rank, rise, splendor, praise, diadem, crown, and glory to all the Princes of Kingdoms, when I sat in the heavenly court. And the Princes of Kingdoms stood beside me to my right and to my left by authority of the Holy One blessed be he. But when Aher came to gaze on the vision of the Merkabah at I set his eyes on me, he became frightened and recoiled before me. And his soul was entranced to the point of leaving him because of fear, dread, and terror of me, when he saw me when I was sitting on a throne like a king, and ministering angels were standing beside me like servants and all the Princes of Kingdoms crowned with crowns surrounded me. And in the same moment, he opened his mouth and said: "Surely there are two powers in heaven." Immediately a heavenly voice went out from before the Shekinah saying: "Return back-sliding children except Aher. In the same moment Anahf, YHWH the glorified spirit, created wonderful, terrible and dreadful Prince came at the dispatch of the Holy One blessed be he and struck me sixty lashes of agat and stood me on my feet."

Although there are considerable differences between 3 Enoch 6 and the talmudic manuscripts, Alexander argues that "It is the central role of sitting that allies 3 Enoch's version of the story with that of Bomberg, and sets it apart from Munich 95. Of course once again the option is, in principle open that both 3 Enoch and Bomberg drew on a common lost source, but there is no advantage in taking this line. It is much simpler to suppose that the author of 3 Enoch

16:15 knew and used the Bomberg version of the story."⁴ Therefore, Alexander concludes that "3 Enoch is based on the Bomberg version of the humbling of Metatron, i.e. it derives from the latest stage in the evolution of the Talmudic tradition."⁵

C. R. A. Morray-Jones has critically examined Alexander's model. Although Morray-Jones accepts Alexander's reconstruction of the sequence of the talmudic manuscripts—as do I, he disagrees with Alexander's view of the relationship between the talmudic tradition and 3 Enoch 16. In Morray-Jones' view, it seems likely that the talmudic accounts represent a 'softening' of an earlier, more radical tradition which is preserved in 3 Enoch. According to Morray-Jones, the cause of Aher's error in 3 Enoch is not simply that Metatron was seated, as Alexander implies, but Metatron's 'god-like and glorious appearance as the enthroned 'Grand Vizier' of Heaven.'⁶ Since the talmudic redactors were interested in discouraging the most extreme forms of Metatron speculation, they eliminated all references to Metatron's glorious and god-like appearance and, instead, characterized him as a less threatening celestial scribe. Morray-Jones concludes that "the talmudic story in its earliest recension [i.e. Munich 95] represents an abbreviated and heavily edited version of the original, which is more fully preserved at 3 Enoch 16."⁷

In order to shed further light on the tradition of Metatron's downfall, I would like to examine two additional sources. The first passage is *Synopse* §672, which explains the apostasy of Elisha ben Abuya in the following way:

Synopse §672

And these are the men who entered the Pardes

Elisha ben Abuya cut the shewb. Concerning him Scripture says: 'Do not allow your mouth, and so forth. They said when Elisha ben Abuya descended to the Merkabah he saw Metatron to whom permission was given to sit and write down the merits of Israel for an hour a day

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Morray-Jones, *Hekhalot Literature and Talmudic Tradition*, p. 30.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 34, as Morray-Jones explains: "In the talmudic versions then, the story of Aher's disastrous encounter with Metatron is related in such a way as to minimize and guard against precisely the kind of extravagant speculation concerning the glorious and God-like appearance of the Lesser Lord; that is preserved in *Sefer Hekhalot* [i.e. 3 Enoch]."⁸ Indeed, Alexander, himself, speculates that the original motivation behind the talmudic tradition "may not have been what Metatron was doing, but rather his glorious appearance." See "3 Enoch and the Talmud," p. 62.

He said: "The sages have taught that on high there is *no standing* and *no sitting*, no jealousy and no rivalry and no neck and no affliction." He contemplated *haher* ~~that~~ perhaps here are two powers in heaven. Immediately they brought out Metatron to outside the Curtain *Pargod* and struck him with sixty fiery lashes. And they gave Metatron permission to burn Elisha's merits. A heavenly voice went out and said: "Return backsliding children except for Aher" [emphasis added].

There are important similarities and differences between this passage and the other versions of Metatron's humbling. Unlike all the talmudic manuscripts, *Synopse* §672 does not open its description with the line "Aher cut the shoots," but, instead reads "Elisha ben Abuyah cut the shoots." This reading fits more closely with the version of the Pardes account in *Tosetia Hag* 2:4 "Elisha looked and cut the shoots" and is identical with the version in *Song of Songs Rabbah* 10:14.²

Synopse §672 states that Elisha "contemplated" *haher* that perhaps there are two powers in heaven. By contrast 3 *Enoch* 16 describes Aher as saying that "There are indeed two powers in heaven" while all of the talmudic recensions have Aher declare "Perhaps — God forbid! — there are two powers." 3 *Enoch* 16 and §672, therefore share the specific reference to the two powers in heaven, while the talmudic recensions and §672 temper the declaration of Aher/Elisha by adding the word "perhaps" and in the case of the Talmud, "God forbid".

Unlike either the talmudic manuscripts or 3 *Enoch* 16, §672 describes Aher/Elisha as only *contemplating* rather than declaring his heretical idea. This feature may have been included to anchorate the severity of Elisha's sin or it may reflect the reluctance of the authors to even record such a heretical declaration. In any case the implication of §672 is that even contemplating the existence of two powers in heaven is a sin, let alone actually declaring their existence.

Although the talmudic accounts do not explicitly declare where Metatron is located the implication is that he is within the Pardes, since the opening line declares that "Four entered the Pardes." By contrast, 3 *Enoch* 16 describes Metatron as sitting at the entrance of the seventh hekhal "pace", the exact location where he is enthroned by God in 3 *Enoch* 10. By contrast §672 reinforces the idea that Metatron was in the Pardes when confronted by

The Palestinian Talmud Hag. 2:77b has "Aher looked and cut the shoots."

Elisha/Aher for it states that "they brought Metatron to outside the Curtain," in order to whip him, a detail absent from the other versions.

By introducing its account with the talmudic line, "Four who entered the Pardes," §672 clearly indicates that the Pardes was the site of the episode in contrast to 3 *Enoch* 16. Nevertheless §672 essentially glosses the talmudic tradition by adding that "Elisha ben Abuya descended to the Merkabah." In doing so, §672 incorporates the Pardes account into the Merkabah tradition and preserves a parallel with 3 *Enoch* 16, which states that "Aher came to gaze on the vision of the Merkabah." Besides this reference to Elisha's descent to the Merkabah, however, §672 lacks any obvious indications that it belongs to the Hekhalot genre, whereas 3 *Enoch* 16 clearly indicates its Hekhalot provenance in a number of ways.¹⁹

Significantly §672 reads like a Hebrew parallel to the Aramaic version in Vaticanus 134. Both passages include the reference to "no standing and no sitting" and most strikingly both declare that Metatron was given permission to "sit and write down the merits of Israel for one hour a day," a detail which is absent from all other versions. If we regard the reference to Elisha's descent to the Merkabah as a gloss whose function was to incorporate the passage into the Hekhalot genre, then we are faced with the conclusion that either §672 drew on Vaticanus 134 for its primary inspiration, that Vaticanus 134 drew on §672, or that both passages drew on a common source. It also seems likely that the version of the story preserved in Bomberg was either unknown to the author of §672 or had not yet been formulated.

As for the relationship between §672 and 3 *Enoch* 16, it appears that besides their common references to the Merkabah, and the "two powers in heaven," there are no other lexical links between the two passages. There is, however, the intriguing reference in §672 to Metatron being cast "outside the Curtain" following Elisha's apostasy while in 3 *Enoch* 16 Metatron is portrayed as being enthroned outside of the Curtain, at the entrance of the seventh hekhal, before

¹⁹ With references to the seventh hekhal, the Merkabah, Azazel, etc.

²⁰ Despite the differences between them, I add join to the ones I have already mentioned, it should be noted that §672 declares that "they gave Metatron permission to burn Elisha's merits," a line which is absent from all the other versions, and which sets up a parallel between the whipping of Metatron with fiery lashes and the burning of Elisha's merits.

²¹ Although the quotations in their entirety have minor differences.

Aher encounters him. It is possible that each passage preserves a competing tradition: one negative, one positive explaining how Metatron ended up at the entrance of God's abode rather than inside it.

Do my observations concerning §672 shed light on the relationship between 3 Enoch 16 and the talmudic recensions? At the very least, they indicate that §672 was probably not influenced by the Fra. recension in MS Bomberg, which Alexander has argued underlies the version in 3 Enoch. On the other other hand, §672 also preserves a Hekhalot tradition which is either unaware of, or has chosen to suppress the glorious appearance of Metatron emphasized by 3 Enoch 16.

Our ability to reconstruct the relationship of the different versions is further complicated by the final Hekhalot witness to the tradition: *Synopse* §597.

Synopse §597

Elisha ben Abiya said: When I ascended to the Pardes, I saw Akatriel, Yab: God of Israel, Lord of Hosts, sitting at the entrance of Pardes and one hundred and twenty myriads of ministering angels were surrounding him. As it is written: "Thousands upon thousands served him, and myriads upon myriads stood before him." (Dan. 7:10). When I saw them, I was awestruck, I trembled, and I passed myself, and entered before the Holy One, blessed be he, I said to him, "Master of the world, as you wrote in your Torah: 'The heavens and the heavens of heavens belong to the Lord your God,' [Deut. 10:14]. And it is written: 'The firmament declares your handwork,' [Psalm 19:2] [This implies] only one [God]. He said to me: 'Elisha my son, did you come here only ~~and~~ with my attributes [*le-hatit' bi-midotai*]? Haven't you heard the proverb which goes

In §597, instead of encountering Metatron, as he does in the other passages I have examined, Elisha ben Abiya sees Akatriel, Yab: God of Israel, Lord of Hosts, sitting at the entrance of Pardes. Although it may therefore be argued that §597 does not belong to the traditions concerning Metatron's downfall, it is clear that this passage is related to the other accounts.

Like Metatron, Akatriel is a highly ambivalent figure. §597 calls Akatriel "God of Israel, Lord of Hosts," which seems to imply that Akatriel is God, except that later in the passage Elisha actually enters Pardes and encounters the Holy One, blessed be he, the most common rabbinic title for God.⁴ A figure named Akatriel appears in

⁴ In fact, Hekhalot sources often refer to exalted angels such as Akatriel and

a number of rabbinic and Hekhalot sources. In BT Berakhot 7a (cf. parallel in Synopse §151), Akatriel is described as follows:

R. Ishmael ben Elisha says: I once entered the innermost part [of the Sanctuary] to burn incense and saw Akatriel Yah, the Lord of Hosts, seated upon a high and exalted throne. He said to me: Ishmael, my son, bless me. I repudiate. May it be your will that your mercy will suppress your anger and your mercy will prevail over your other attributes [mizudneka]. And that you will deal with your children according to the measure of mercy and on their behalf stop short of the limit of strict justice. And he added to me with his head.

As Scholem noted, it cannot be determined from this passage whether Akatriel represents the name of an angel or the name of God Himself in one of the aspects of His glory as it is revealed upon the throne.⁴ In *3 Enoch* 1:1B, Akatriel YHWH of Hosts functions as a manifestation of God and is described as ordering Metatron to fulfill the requests of Moses.⁵ Akatriel appears in other Hekhalot passages, as well, where he is characterized as God, an angel, or the secret name engraved on the divine throne or crown.⁶

In order to fully appreciate the similarities and differences between §597 and the other accounts, I will analyze §597 in detail. Unlike §672 and the talmudic recensions, §597 does not begin with the line "Aher/Elisha ben Abuya cut the shoots." Instead it opens with the line "Elisha ben Abuya said," and portrays the episode as the first-person testimony of Elisha ben Abuya, just as *3 Enoch* 6 treats the episode as the first person testimony of Metatron; the other accounts are in the third person. These differences in narrative voice are important because they suggest a difference in perspective. By portraying him as a heavenly scribe rather than a glorious vice-regent, the Talmud depicts Metatron as a more lowly figure than *3 Enoch*. The latter text's more sympathetic image of Metatron is reinforced by his first person account of his heavenly meeting with Aher.

Metatron with names reserved for God in more esoteric Jewish literature. Cf. Wolfgang Faath, "Tatzele Le'ezrah and Metatron in der jüdischen Merkabah-Mystik," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 22 (1991).

⁴ Synopse §151. The same episode is described, except instead of burning incense, R. Ishmael is offering a sacrifice on the altar when he sees Akatriel.

⁵ *Jewish Mysticism*, p. 5. For a discussion of the mystical significance of this passage see Yehuda Liebes, "De Na ara Dei: On the Development of the Jewish Mystical Stages in Jewish Myth and Jewish Messianism," Albany, 1993, pp. 106.

⁶ The identification of Akatriel with God and not an angel in this passage is supported by Scholem, *Jewish Mysticism*, p. 5; Ginzberg, *Enoch* ch. 5B, p. 42, n. 4 and Alexander, "3 (Hebrew Apocalypse of) Enoch," p. 304.

⁷ The name Akatriel appears in a number of Hekhalot passages including § 39, where it is probably a name for God, §13B where Akatriel is either God or an angel

In *3 Enoch* we hear Metatron's side of the story, as it were. Likewise, §597 provides us with Elisha ben Abuya's perspective on what happened when he ascended to Pardes and not coincidentally. I would argue, §597 presents a much more sympathetic portrayal of Elisha ben Abuya.

One way of explaining these differences is that both *3 Enoch* and §597 represent voices from within Merkabah circles, whereas the Talmud may reflect a dissenting view from without the mystical tradition or a more conservative voice from within the Merkabah movement.¹⁴ The use of first person voices establishes an empathetic link between the reader, presumably a mystic himself, and the figures of Metatron and Elisha ben Abuya, respectively. This is significant given the broader phenomenon of identification within Merkabah mysticism. Thus, Metatron was once Enoch, who serves as a model for Rabin Ishmael, who in turn serves as a model for the readers of the Merkabah texts. It is also important to note the different contexts of the accounts. The talmudic account was intended for a general audience, whereas the Hekhalot passages were written for a limited audience of mystical adepts. The Talmud's version may therefore function as a warning to the general public against the possible dangers of Merkabah mysticism.

§597 continues with Elisha's declaration "When I ascended to the Pardes". The explicit reference to ascension contrasts §597 with the talmudic accounts, which open with the line "Four entered *nehle* in the Pardes" and with *3 Enoch*, which states that "Aheh came to gaze on the Merkabah". Furthermore, the use of the term "ascend-er" differentiates §597 from §672 which states that Elisha ben Abuya "descended to the Merkabah". Like §672 and the talmudic versions, and unlike *3 Enoch* 16, which refers to the hekhalot, §597 depicts the Pardes as the location of the episode. Yet, in striking contrast to

who receives prayers §10 where Metatron is named Akatzei's "servant" and Akatzei is explicitly identified with God, Geniza fragment 19 which parallels §30: §50 where the name Akatzei is engraved on God's crown and Geniza §66 where Akatzei is an angel in the fourth heaven and §10: §68 where Akatzei is the name of an angel. Scholem has argued (*Jerusalem*, 1-4) that "re-acting Akatzei in this way as a secret name of the crown seems to be both a plausible and a rational explanation of its etymology." William Rosenau, "Some Notes on Akatzei," *Oriental Studies Dedicated to Paul Hupf, Baltimore* 1926 pp. 103-15 arrives at the same conclusion. Scholem, loc. cit. 35 writes that Rosenau "has guessed the correct explanation without being aware of existence of the various passages in the Merkabah literature and without mentioning Rashi, from whose commentary he took."

¹⁴ As I have suggested above, §672 appears to belong to the same branch of the tradition as MS Vaticanus.

§672 §597 does not add a gloss to integrate its account into the Hekhalot genre. Indeed, there is no mention of the Merkabah in §597, unlike in both §672 and 3 *Enoch*.

Strikingly, Elisha's vision of Akatriel does not occur within the Pardes, as imparted in the talmudic versions and §672, but at its entrance, a detail which meshes structurally with the location of Metatron at the entrance of the seventh hekhal in 3 *Enoch*. At this point, we might ask whether §597 has merely transformed the motif in 3 *Enoch*, i.e. transferring the locus of the encounter from the entrance of the seventh hekhal to the entrance of Pardes or whether there is another source which may have influenced its formation. In fact, there is a pre-talmudic tradition which parallels the location in §597.²⁷

In the *Testament of Abraham*, Recension A, (c. 100 CE), Abraham ascends to heaven and encounters the proto-plast Adam (Gk. *ho protoplastos*) seated on a throne at the entrance of Paradise. Because of its many thematic connections to the Ahez/Metatron tradition, I will cite chapter 1, at length and will italicize those phrases which are most significant for my comparison:

Michael turned the chariot and brought Abraham toward the east, to the first gate of heaven. And Abraham saw... a man seated on a golden throne. And the appearance of that man was terrifying, like the Minister.

And when the wondrous one who was seated on the throne of gold saw few entering through the strait gate, but many entering the broad gate, immediately that wondrous man tore the hair of his head and the beard of his cheeks, and he threw himself on the ground from his throne crying and wailing. And when he saw many souls entering through the strait gate, then he arose from the earth and sat on his throne very heartily rejoicing and exulting. Then Abraham asked the Commander-in-Chief: My lord Commander-in-Chief, what the most wondrous man who is adorned in such glory? This is the first-formed Adam who is in such glory, and he looks at the world, where everyone has come from him. And when he sees many souls entering through the strait gate, then he arises and sits on his throne rejoicing and exulting heartily, because this strait gate is the gate of the righteous which leads to life, and those who enter through it come into Paradise. And when he sees many souls entering the broad gate, then he pulls the hair of his head and casts himself on the ground crying and wailing bitterly, for the broad gate is the gate of the sinners, which leads to destruction and eternal punishment.²⁸

²⁷ As Murray Jones has noted: "This is analogous to the position of Metatron in 3 *Enoch*, a precise parallel is found in a surviving fragment of a lost Hekhalot work [i.e. §597] 'Transformational Mysticism,' p. 17."

²⁸ F. P. Sanders, *Testament of Abraham*, Recension A, in James Charlesworth, ed. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*.

Like Elisha ben Abuva in §597 Abraham encounters a glorious being enthroned at the entrance of a heavenly place called Paradise/Pargos. The appearance of this enthroned being is terrifying like the Master's.¹ The terrifying character of the being in the *Testament of Abraham* parallels the depictions of Metatron and Akatriel in 3 *Enoch* and §597, respectively. Even more significantly, this being is described as resembling the "Master" — that is, God — precisely the source for the confusion in all of the versions of the Aher/Metatron tradition.²

Unlike Aher, Abraham possesses a heavenly guide in the form of Michael. This detail also differentiates Aher from R. Ishmar, who is led through heaven by Metatron in 3 *Enoch*. Indeed part of the polemical focus of the Aher/Metatron tradition may be directed against the practice of heavenly ascents without an angelic guide, perhaps indicating a desire to preserve an earlier apocalyptic mode for ascents. Certainly the presence of an angelic guide in the *Testament of Abraham* leads to a very different result. Rather than speculating that the enthroned being is a second God as in the Aher/Metatron tradition, Abraham wisely asks Michael to identify the mysterious figure. "Then Abraham asked: 'who is this most wondrous man, who is adorned in such glory?'"

The text links the enthroned figure to the separation of human beings into righteous and unrighteous camps, a detail which recalls the role of Metatron in the Talmud and §672 as a heavenly scribe who records the merits of Israel. The *Testament of Abraham* also contains the elements of standing and sitting which feature so prominently in the Aher/Metatron tradition. A voluntary dethronement occurs in the *Testament of Abraham* when souls enter the broad gate signifying damnation. By contrast the wondrous figure stands and re-senhirnes himself when souls enter the narrow gate of righteousness. Although the reasons for enthronement and dethronement are different in the various versions of the Aher/Metatron tradition, the dynamic of standing and sitting is an intriguing parallel. Underlying all the sources is the sense that there are proper and improper times to sit and stand in heaven. Adam dethrones himself as a sign of mourning in the *Testament of Abraham*, which employs the same motifs as the Aher/Metatron tradition to produce a different story.

¹ That the "Master" in chapter 1 of the *Testament of Abraham* should be identified as God is clear from chapter 8.

Another link between the *Testament of Abraham* and the Aher/Metatron tradition involves the identification of the "wondrous" figure as the proto-past Adam. Despite the fact that Cosmic Adam traditions originated in Jewish circles, extant Merkabah sources do not possess a Cosmic Adam tradition.¹ Nor do they explicitly identify Adam with Metatron, a link which is well documented in kabbalistic sources.² Nevertheless, several scholars have posited that an early tradition linking the two figures probably existed. According to Odeberg this tradition was "obliterated" as a reaction against Mandaean speculation concerning the Primordial Man, although possible vestiges may still be found in Hekhalot literature.³ By contrast, Idel prefers to view the suppression of the Cosmic Adam tradition in Hekhalot circles as a product of "internal tension between different tendencies in early Jewish mysticism," rather than as a reaction to Gnostic or Mandaean speculation.⁴

The existence of a no longer extant tradition linking Metatron and Adam is supported by a number of sources which portray Adam as God's vice-regent.⁵ For example in 2 Enoch 30:1, God declares concerning Adam: "And on the earth I assigned him to be a second angel, honored and great and glorious. And I assigned him to be king, to reign on the earth, and to have my wisdom. And there was nothing comparable to him on the earth, even among my creatures that exist. Indeed, there exists a rabbinic passage concerning Adam with striking parallels to the Aher/Metatron tradition:

¹ Moshe Idel, "Enoch is Metatron," p. 151.

² Ibid. pp. 50-51. Cf. Moshe Idel, *Le Livre hébreu d'Enoch ou Livre des secrets*, pp. 51-55. Cf. Odeberg, *Enoch*, p. 23. Moshe Idel has more to say on the subject when he discusses the myth of Metatron in "Metatron: Notes on the Development of a Myth in Judaism," in Haiman Pedasah, ed., *Myth in Judaism* (Jerusalem, 1996) (Hebrew). Unfortunately, Idel's essay came to my attention as this book was coming to press and I was unable to include it in my discussion.

³ Enoch, pp. 7-8 and 5-83. Latest mention may be made of a possible vestige of the conception of Metatron as a primordial being occurring in E 48C. I made him Metatron, strong or Mighty, in the time of the first Adam. One might read in this statement an allusion to Metatron as connected with or being the Primordial man, the *Adam Qadmon*.

⁴ "Enoch is Metatron," p. 152. On the connection between Adam and Enoch, see pp. 155-156.

⁵ As Jarl Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, p. 271, writes "That Adam was made God's vice-king over the creation is an old and widespread tradition which is elaborated upon particularly in the so-called Adam literature." The Adam literature consists of a group of accounts concerning Adam preserved in Greek, Syriac, Mandaean, Ethiopic, Armenian, and Sanskrit, as well as *The Apocalypse of Adam* from Codex V of the Nag Hammadi Library.

R. Hoshaya said: When the Holy One blessed be He, created Adam, the ministering angels mistook him for a divine being and wished to utter the *Sanctus* before him. What does this resemble? A king and a governor who sat in a chariot and his subjects wished to say to the king *Domine*, but they did not know which one it was. What did the king do? He pushed the governor out of the chariot so they know who was the king. (*Genesis Rabbah* B 3¹⁰)

In this passage, Adam is compared to a governor whose similar appearance to the king confuses the latter's subjects. The parable notes that both king and governor were sitting in a chariot, a parallel to the image of Metatron sitting like God in heaven, particularly since God is said to sit on a throne-chariot (cf. Ezekiel 1). The angels who wish to say the *Sanctus* before Adam resemble Aher who wondered whether Metatron was a 'second power' in heaven. Just as Metatron is dethroned in the Aher/Metatron tradition, so Adam is tossed off the chariot in *Genesis Rabbah*, making it clear who is and isn't God. In terms of dating, the tradition preserved in *Genesis Rabbah* may stand somewhere inbetween the other sources. It may have functioned as a polemic against the earlier tradition of the enthroned glorious Adam whose appearance was 'like the Master's' and as a bridge between the positive image of the enthroned vice-regent figure and the more ambivalent image in the talmudic version of the Aher/Metatron tradition.

Recension B of the *Testament of Abraham* preserves a different version of Abraham's heavenly adventure. Instead of getting off his throne as a sign of mourning, in this version Adam cries when he sees a damned soul being led to destruction and laughs when he sees a soul entering the gate of life (ch. 8). And yet Recension B preserves other details which may have influenced the development of the Aher/Metatron tradition. In chapter 10, Michael takes Abraham to Paradise. There Abraham sees a judge whom he identifies as Abel. Command another figure who 'writes records' to present himself. The description of this figure suggests connections with both Metatron and Akatziel.

¹⁰ For discussions of this passage and the Aher/Metatron tradition, see Sam Lieberman, 'Metatron: the Meaning of His Name and His Function', p. 239. On this tradition see also Murray Jones, 'Transformational Mysticism', p. 7. E. Wolfson, *Yenidah la-Mekavah*, pp. 24-25. Idel, 'Enoch is Metatron', p. 53, where he cites a parallel passage from the *Alphabet of Aqiba*, and p. 64 n. 18, where he discusses the *Genesis Rabbah* passage.

The judge commanded the one who writes the records to come. And behold there came cherubim bearing two books and with them was a very enormous man. And he had on his head three crowns, and one crown was higher than the other two crowns. The crowns are called the crowns of witness. And the man had in his hand a golden pen."

Like Metatron in the *Shur Qomah* tradition, this figure is described as "a very enormous man." Like Metatron and Akatriel, he is associated with a crown or crowns: indeed the very name Akatriel contains the Hebrew word for crown, *keter*. These crowns are called the "crowns of witness," a title associated with Metatron. Heb. "witness" *eid*. Finally, the figure holds a pen in his hand, which suggests that he is a scribe like Metatron in the Talmudic version of the Aher/Metatron tradition. Chapter 11 makes the connection with Metatron stronger, for it identifies the figure with the pen as Enoch:

And the one who produces the evidence is the teacher of heaven and earth and the scribe of righteousness Enoch. For the Lord sent them here in order that they might record the sins and the righteous deeds of each person. And Abraham said, "And how can Enoch bear the weight of the souls, since he has not seen death? Or how can he give the sentence of all the souls?" And Michael said, "If we were to give sentence concerning them, it would not be accepted. But it is not Enoch's business to give sentence; rather, the Lord is the one who gives sentence, and I as his one, Enoch, ask only to write. For Enoch prayed to the Lord saying, 'Lord, I do not want to give the sentence of the souls, lest I become oppressor to someone.' And the Lord said to Enoch, 'I shall command you to write the sins of a soul that makes atonement, and it will enter into life. And if the soul has not made atonement and repented, you will find its sins already written, and it will be cast into punishment.'"

This intriguing passage emphasizes that while Enoch has been granted the authority to function as a scribe, he cannot sentence the souls, since this responsibility is reserved for God. Moreover, Enoch is only allowed to record the sins of people who have already atoned and repented and not the sins which are still outstanding. These motifs are remarkably similar to the description of Metatron in the Talmudic version of the Aher/Metatron tradition. In the Talmud Metatron is described as "recording the merits of Israel," which

² E. P. Sanders, "Testament of Abraham," *Recession B*, in James Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, p. 900.
Ibid.

jokes with the notion of only recording sins which have already been atoned for. Like the *Testament of Abraham*, the Talmud does not depict this scribal figure as possessing the authority of a judge. Indeed, the Talmud's attack on Metatron's sitting may be an implicit rejection of this kind of authority. Whereas Metatron makes the mistake of appearing like he possesses the authority of a divine figure rather than a mere scribe in this passage, Enoch makes it clear that he does 'not want to give sentence'. Thus, the tales employ similar motifs to different ends. In the Talmud, Metatron appears as a careless figure at best and a hubristic one at worst in the *Testament of Abraham*, Enoch explicity humbles himself and rejects the kind of authority which is the unique possession of God. While it is possible that these thematic parallels are coincidental, the different versions of the Aker/Metatron tradition may also have adopted and transformed elements from both recensions of the *Testament of Abraham*, a work which probably originated in the first century C.E.

Returning to §597, we find that Akatriel is described as 'sitting' and 'one hundred and twenty myriads of ministering angels were surrounding him. As it is written: 'Thousands upon thousands served him and myriads upon myriads stood before him.' [Daniel 7:10] In §597, Akatriel is not merely sitting, but is enthroned just as Metatron is in 3 *Enoch* 6. Indeed, both passages reflect the image of the divine judge or *atik yomin* in Daniel 7:10, although 3 *Enoch* 16 'and ministering angels were standing beside me like servants and all the Princes of Kingdoms crowned with crowns surrounded me' only implicitly draws on this *image*, while §597 explicitly cites the biblical lemma.

What does this parallel imply about the relationship of 3 *Enoch* 16 and §597? Of course both sources may have independently decided to employ the image of the *atik yomin* in Daniel 7:10 in order to characterize their respective supra-angelic figures. Yet, the other parallels – and we will see more below – between the accounts allude to a closer relationship. Either both passages drew on a common tradition which depicted the subject of Elisha/Aher's vision as the enthroned vice-regent or one passage was influenced by the other. We have already seen one case in which §597 appears to have preserved an earlier form of a motif shared by 3 *Enoch* 16, namely the location of the angelic being at the entrance of Pardes or Paradise (as in the *Testament of Abraham*, rather than at the entrance of the seventh hekhal).

Determining which passage preserves the earlier depiction of

the enthroned vice regent figure is more difficult. On the one hand, §547 may represent an earlier version because it is more compact and because it explicitly quotes Daniel 7. As the tradition developed it may have expanded to include more details of the angelic vice regent's glorious appearance and as the formulation became more elaborate the originally explicit connection with the biblical *emma* may have been omitted in favor of a more creative reworking. Of course, it is also possible that the author of §547 opted for a more concise formulation and therefore eliminated what he considered to be the excessive detail of the earlier tradition.

A further parallel between §547 and *3 Enoch* 16 is the fear which the angelic vice regent figure inspires in the human observer. §547 states that after Elisha saw Akatnel and his angelic host, he announced: "I was alarmed, I trembled," while *3 Enoch* states that after Aher saw Metatron and his angelic host he became frightened and trembled—his soul was alarmed. This element of fear is completely absent from §652 and from the talmudic recensions. Indeed, these accounts do not portray Metatron in a particularly awe inspiring manner.

Metatron's glorious, terrifying appearance provides the most reasonable explanation for Aher's confusion. Given this conclusion, we may reconstruct the relationship between *3 Enoch* 16 and the talmudic recensions as follows: "Initially, the tradition of Metatron's humbling was motivated by his glorious appearance, which quite reasonably caused Aher to consider him a second divinity. Indeed, in *3 Enoch* 16, Aher confidently declares "Surely there are two powers in heaven." As the earliest recension of the talmudic tradition Munich 95 represents the most severe attempt to suppress any hint of Metatron's glorious appearance. In its general zeal to counteract the image of Metatron as an angelic vice regent, however, Munich 95 also eliminated any specific reason for Aher's confusion. Therefore the talmudic authors of Vaticanus 134 and Bomberg emphasized Metatron's sitting—a motif which echoed the enthronement of Metatron in the earlier tradition. The new focus on sitting had the advantage of implicitly attacking Metatron's enthronement without actually describing it in glorious terms. In contrast to the talmudic recensions, *3 Enoch* 16 does not reject

¹ Although I arrived at the basic elements of my reconstruction before reading Morray-Jones' article "Heikhalot Literature and Talmudic Tradition," I am nevertheless indebted to his cogent model for certain details of my formulation.

Metatron's glorious appearance and enthronement. Instead it argues that *despite* Metatron's godlike qualities, we should not mistake him for another god. In other words, 3 *Enoch* 16 accepts the image of Metatron as an enthroned vice regent but warns against confusing the angelic vice regent with another god. By contrast, the talmudic authors were entirely opposed to Metatron's glorious appearance, and therefore focused on another tradition also linked with Enoch that characterized Metatron as a scribe. The implicit goal of the talmudic versions is to combat Metatron's vice regency altogether. The assumptions and goals of 3 *Enoch* 16 and the talmudic recensions are therefore quite different, even contradictory. By suggesting this reconstruction I am not arguing that the actual text of 3 *Enoch* 16 is earlier than the Talmud but that its depiction preserves an earlier form of the tradition.

If the relationship between 3 *Enoch* 16 and the talmudic tradition appears clearer, we are still faced with the equally vexing problem of the relationship between 3 *Enoch* 16 and §597.¹⁴ Although Elisha/Aher is described as alarmed and trembling with fear in both 3 *Enoch* and §597, his subsequent reaction differs significantly in each account. In 3 *Enoch* 16, like in the other versions, Aher's vision is followed by his heretical declaration. By contrast, §597 preserves a stunning detail: "I pushed myself and entered before the Holy One blessed be He." In other words, Elisha actually encounters God when he enters Pardes, a far more radical idea than encountering Metatron or Akatziel, no matter how glorious they are. Thus §597 preserves the most extreme depiction of the mystical experience achieved by Elisha/Aher. Once again we must ask whether this feature reflects a later addition, or an earlier element which was suppressed in later accounts.

Instead of immediately uttering a heretical "two powers" declaration, in §597 Elisha actually *speaks* with the Holy One blessed be He. This is an amazing event which recalls the relationship between God and Moses at Sinai, more than it does the relationship between God and the Merkabah mystic in the seventh hekhal. Although the tenor of Elisha's words indicates that the glorious appearance of Akatziel has troubled him, unlike in the other accounts, Elisha does not declare that there may be, or are, "two powers." Quite the contrary, he addresses God as the "Master of the

¹⁴ As I mentioned above, §672 appears to be related to MS Vaticanus 134.

world" and cites two carefully chosen verses from "Your Torah" which support the uniqueness of God's authority.

The first of these verses, Deuteronomy 10:14, forms part of the divine instructions which Moses transmits to Israel following his second sojourn on Mount Sinai. If the depiction of Elisha's ascent and dialogue with God are at least partially inspired by the traditions of Moses' paradigmatic ascent and dialogue with God, then it is no accident that the author of §397 places Moses' words on Elisha's lips. Secondly, Deut. 10:14 was a common proof-text for the existence of three heavens since it repeats the word "heavens" three times.¹⁶ Why is the reference to three heavens significant? We can only answer this question if we assume that the author of §397 identified the *Parades* as the third heaven.¹⁷ Therefore by reciting the verse

"The heavens and heavens of heavens belong to the Lord your God," Elisha is arguing that all three heavens belong solely to God, rather than to God and another divine being, i.e. Akatriel. The second verse cited by Elisha is also significant. Although Elisha only cites the second half of Psalms 148, as is often the case, the unquoted part of the verse is at least as important: "The heavens declare the glory of God." Once again the emphasis of the verse is on the sole dominion of God over the heavens.

After reciting these verses Elisha declares *'had bitnad* or "only one." In other words, rather than declaring the existence of two powers, Elisha emphasizes the uniqueness of God. Thus Elisha challenges God to explain the incongruity between the monotheism which he knows to be true and the godlike appearance of Akatriel. In this formulation, the onus falls on God's shoulders to explain the apparent discrepancy, rather than on Elisha for having hypothesized the existence of two deities or Akatriel for having appeared like another deity. This interpretation is supported by God's response to Elisha's declaration. Instead of a heavenly voice declaring "Return backsliding children except Aher," God addresses Elisha. Although God crucifies Elisha for "coming only to find fault," he acts more like a father instructing a wayward child

¹⁶ Cf., for example, R. Judah's use of Deut. 10:14 in BT Hag. 12b.

¹⁷ In *Jerush Gnosticism* pp. 4-19 Scholem argued that the basis of parallels with Paul's account in II Corinthians—that the *Parades* should be equated with the third heaven. Peter Schafer, "New Testament and Hekhalot Literature: The Journey into Heaven in Paul and Merkavah Mysticism," challenges Scholem's position. The identification of Paradise as the third heaven is common in apocalyptic sources, cf. *Testament of Abraham* 11, *Tape of Adam and Eve* 37:4-5 (Greek version), 2 *Enoch* 8-9.

(God calls Elisha "my son" and recites a proverb in order to enlighten him), rather than a distant, angry deity rebuking a heretic as in the other accounts.

The specific phrasing of God's criticism of Elisha is extremely significant: "did you come here only to find fault with my attributes [*le-harher at middotai*]" As we saw above in BT Ber 7a, R. Ishmael prays that Akatziel's "mercy may prevail over your other attributes [*middotekha*]" Thus, the attributes or *middot* of mercy and justice were specifically associated with Akatziel in at least one tradition. It is possible that §597 depicts Akatziel as the hypostatic embodiment of the attributes of mercy and justice, an interpretation supported by the depiction of Akatziel as the enthroned judge from Daniel 7:10.¹⁷ Yet, in other sources the term *middot* refers not to God's attributes, but to His "measures," i.e. to His *Shur Qemah*. Instead of representing God's attributes, therefore, Akatziel may function as the hypostatic embodiment of God's *form* in §597. Whichever interpretation is correct, the gist of God's gentle rebuke of Elisha is not to condemn Akatziel and certainly not to whip him with fiery lashes, but to *defend* him. In other words, §597 does not attempt to undermine the existence of an angelic vice-regent but to support such a conception.

It is also noteworthy that in §597 God asks Elisha whether he came "to find fault," which in the original Hebrew is expressed by the verb *le-harher*. Above we mentioned that §672 employs the word *harher* to depict the heretical activity of Elisha, i.e. "He contemplated [*harher*] that perhaps there are two powers in heaven." Thus, both §597 and §672 employ the same verb to describe Elisha's action in Pardes. In other sources, the term specifically refers to idyllic or sexually impure thoughts.¹⁸ The first connotation is relevant for both §597 and §672 even though the more precise sense of the verb in the former passage is "to find fault," whereas in the latter, it is "to contemplate."¹⁹ Is it a coincidence that both passages employ the same verb in parallel contexts: did they draw on a common tradition, or did one formulation influence the other?

Indeed, how can one explain the provenance of a passage which barely criticizes Elisha, defends Akatziel, and yet is clearly related to

N. Dahl and A. Segal, "Philo and the Rabbis on the Names of God," *Journal for Study of Judaism* 11, 1978, have extensively explored the traditions concerning God and His attributes.

¹⁷ Cf. BT Ber 12b, Midd. 13b, Yoma 29a.

¹⁸ Both meanings are attested to in rabbinic literature, cf. Jastrow, p. 766.

a well attested tradition which harshly punishes both Elisha and Akatriel's counterpart, Metatron.² In my opinion, the most plausible explanations are also the most radical. That is, either §347 preserves the earliest form of a tradition which was later linked with Metatron, or it represents a late attempt to rehabilitate both Elisha and the angelic being he encounters.

I have already observed that §39² probably preserves at least one pre-Talmudic tradition, namely the enthronement of God's vice regent at the entrance of Paradise in the *Testament of Abraham*. At present, I will examine other indications that §347 may reflect a pre-Talmudic stage of the tradition. §347 lacks the stinging portrayal of Elisha as an arch-heretic and also omits another feature which all the other accounts preserve: the identification of Elisha ben Abuya as Aher. In the talmudic recensions and *Seder 'Olam*, Aher is cited throughout as the name of the individual who encounters Metatron, in §372 Elisha ben Abuya is described as seeing Metatron and is only called Aher after his heretical "two powers" declaration. In §347, however, the only name mentioned is Elisha ben Abuya, Aher does not appear at all. Likewise, in all the accounts besides §347 the character who encounters Metatron is condemned by a heavenly voice with the phrase "Return, backsliding children except Aher."³

The only possible explanations for the absence of the name Aher in §347 are that the author knew of the tradition identifying Elisha as Aher and chose to suppress it or that he was unaware of this tradition. If the latter suggestion is correct, then the episode preserved in §347 must be older than, or somehow unaware of, all the other accounts we have examined. In addition, it must be older or unaware of the Palestinian Talmud's version of the Pardes account, since in PT Hag. 77b 11 the name Aher is already attributed to Elisha. Significantly, the Tosefta manuscripts all employ the name Elisha except for MS Erfurt and appear to be unaware of the name Aher. Yet, the Tosefta still condemns Elisha by declaring that "Elisha looked and cut the shoots." Unlike the Tosefta or the other accounts, §347 does not mention that Elisha/Aher "cut the shoots." Once again we must ask whether this means that §347 preserves an earlier tradition or whether the author was unaware of, or chose to omit, this motif.

² The ultimate source for this quote is probably the Palestinian Talmud Hag. 77b. Significantly, the formulation in the PT does not include the name Aher, but reads "Return, backsliding children, except for Elisha ben Abuya, for he knew my power yet rebelled against me!"

Besides the elements which I have already discussed, there are several additional features which support an early origin for the tradition in §597. Unlike §672 or *3 Enoch* 16, §597 gives no evidence of having been integrated into the Hekhalot tradition of descent to the Merkabah. *3 Enoch* 16 explicitly mentions the "seventh hekhal," and relates that "Aher came to gaze on the vision of the Merkabah," whereas §672 states, "when Elisha ben Abuya descended to the Merkabah." §597 lacks any references to the Merkabah or to the Hekhalot and instead reads like a talmudic tradition in its emphasis on the Pardes, and its prohibition of biblical proof-texts, none of which are cited in the other accounts.

Therefore, we are faced with considerable evidence that §597 preserves an early tradition. Nevertheless, as I mentioned above, there is another potential solution to the problems presented by §597. Instead of preserving the earliest form of the tradition, §597 may actually represent a late composition. If so, then the author of §597 chose to suppress or simply ignore otherwise universally attested motifs (such as the name Aher, the references to "backsliding children," and "two powers," etc.) in order to paint an extremely different portrait of the characters involved. This portrait did not involve Metatron, but another supra-angelic being, Akatnel, who may have replaced Metatron because the author considered him to be the rightful angelic vice regent or merely because he considered Akatnel to be another name for Metatron. If it is late the formulation may reflect the work of the German Pietists, who played a critical role in the redaction and transmission of the Hekhalot material.

Unlike the authors of the talmudic recensions and §672, and to an even greater degree than the author of *3 Enoch* 16, the author of §597 defended the angelic vice regent in his account. The rehabilitation of the vice regent figure may have been one of the motivations for the changes made in §597. Yet, in addition to defending the vice regent, the author only mildly condemned Elisha for pointing out an apparent tension between what Elisha saw (a godlike figure) and what he knew to be the truth as stated in the Torah: the uniqueness of God. Why would the author have wanted to rehabilitate the figure of Elisha?

Murray-Jones has written "that what the talmudic redactors sought . . . to suppress was a certain form of speculation concerning the angel Metatron as Lesser LORD and enthroned Vice-Regent in heaven . . . and not the practice of heavenly ascents or Hekhalot

mysticism as such."¹⁴ Although I agree completely that the talmudic redactors wished to suppress the tradition of Metatron as enthroned vice regent, I would like to re-examine the question of whether they sought to suppress or at least undermine the practice of heavenly ascents. Clearly the Talmud does not seek to completely suppress the practice of heavenly ascent for it indicates that R. Akiba ascended and descended safely. Yet, by undermining the tradition of Metatron's heavenly enthronement the talmudic redactors were implicitly attacking the view that the Merkaban mystic could ascend to heaven and repeat the process of enthronement and angelification originally undergone by Enoch-Metatron. This message is reinforced by the transformation of Aher into the arch-heretic. One imagines that most people hearing or reading this account would become wary of heavenly ascent and visionary experience. If this reconstruction is correct, then the author of §597 may have rehabilitated the angelic vice regent and Elisha in order to rehabilitate a central goal of Merkaban mysticism, itself, i.e. the vision of God's Glory and the enthronement and angelification which accompanies it.

Although both solutions have their merits, my own preference is for the former name, that §597 preserves the earliest form of a tradition which originally concerned Akatriel and only later was transferred to Metatron. My primary reason for supporting this mode is its greater simplicity; furthermore it better explains certain archaic features, such as Akatriel's enthronement at the entrance of Pardes.¹⁵ In either case, §597 raises many basic methodological questions for our understanding of Hekhalot literature. On what basis does §597 belong to the Hekhalot genre? It lacks any references to the Hekhalot or the Merkaban. It depicts an angelic figure but so do many rabbinic passages. It describes Elisha as ascending to heaven but the Talmud implies this as well. It indeed as mentioned above §597 reads more like a rabbinic passage than a Hekhalot one. My analysis has shown that it is possible to suggest a redactional sequence of the various rabbinic and Hekhalot versions of a particular tradition yet it is sometimes more difficult to identify the

¹⁴ "Hekhalot Literature and Talmudic Tradition," p. 36.

¹⁵ Although one could argue that the *Paradise* derives from 3 Enoch 16's description of Metatron at the entrance of the seventh hekhal. But why would the author of §597 have transferred the location from the entrance of the seventh hekhal to the entrance of the Pardes? Unless, of course, he was trying to create what appeared to be an early tradition. Once again, however, this is a more complicated explanation.

particular genre to which a passage belongs. Essentially the distinction between rabbinic and Hekhalot literature may be much less concrete and far more heuristic than previously accepted. As I have argued, the talmudic account of Metatron's downfall implicitly undermines the tradition of the heavenly enthronement and glorious appearance of an angelic vice regent figure. By contrast, the versions of the episode preserved in *3 Enoch* 16 and §597 do not seek to negate the image of the enthroned vice regent, but rather, to warn against viewing this figure as a second God, despite his glorious appearance.

Ultimately, the *Vorlage* for Metatron's humbling may be the biblical, intertestamental, and rabbinic tradition-complex which depicts a human or angelic being as attempting and failing to attain divine status. Thus, in Isaiah 14:12-15, we read

How are you fallen from heaven, O Shining One, Son of Dawn [Vulgate = Lucifer] How are you felled to earth, O vanquisher of nations! Once you thought in your heart: I will climb to the sky; Higher than the stars of God I will set my throne. I will sit on the mount of assembly. On the summit of Zaphon I will mount the back of a cloud. I will march the Most High. Instead you are brought down to Sheol, to the bottom of the Pit.

And in Ezekiel 28:1-8

The word of the Lord came to me: O mortal, say to the prince of Tyre: Thus said the Lord God: Because you have been so haughty and have said: I am a god. I sit enthroned like a god in the heart of the seas, whereas you are not a god but a man, though you deemed your mind to a god's — they shall strike down your splendor. They shall bring you down to the Pit.

Significantly, in a passage which recalls the dethronement of Metatron in *Pardes*, Ezekiel 28 links the King of Tyre with Adam:

You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and flawless in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God. I created you as a cherub with outstretched shining wings. You grew haughty because of your beauty; you deposed your wisdom for the sake of your splendor. I have cast you to the ground.

¹On the mythological background of Isaiah 14, cf. B. S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament*, London, 1960, pp. 61-71.

²On this identification see H. G. May, "The King of the Garden of Eden," in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg*, eds. B. W. Anderson and W. Harrelson, London, 1962, pp. 106-116; Nils Dahl, "The Arrogant Archon," p. 703.

The tradition of Metatron's downfall clearly echoes these biblical passages.¹ Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 warn against another figure exalting himself on high and challenging the unique authority of God. Indeed, the talmudic authors may have viewed Metatron as a contemporary version of the "Son of Dawn / King of Tyre."² Accordingly, they ensured that like his biblical predecessors, Metatron was dethroned by God and his divinity explicitly rejected.

Further inspiration for the demotion of Metatron may have come from the well attested intertestamental tradition of a Fallen Angel whose sin involved heavenly enthronement.³ Thus in 2 Enoch 29, we read that "one from the order of angels, having turned away with the order that was under him, or eyed an impossible thought, to place his throne higher than the clouds above the earth, that he might become equal in rank to my power. And I threw him out from the height."⁴ Besides the common motif of angelic enthronement and forcible dethronement, the link between Metatron and the fallen

¹ As several scholars have argued, the tradition of the fallen angel may ultimately derive from the ancient Canaanite figure of Ailatar, who attempted to fill the throne of Baal but later and unsuccessfully had to descend and rule the underworld. I. R. Coatsworth, *Sanchuniathon: The First Pagan Bible* (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1969), pp. 53-54; Francis Faure, *The Enthronement of Sabaoth: Jewish Elements in Gnostic Creation Myths*, Leiden, 1978, p. 27.

² On the King of Tyre in later Jewish sources, cf. Faure, *op. cit.* pp. 24-25.

³ On fallen angels, cf. Leo Jung, *Fallen Angels in Jewish, Christian and Mohammedan Literature*, Philadelphia, 1926; Bernard Bamberger, *Fallen Angels*, Philadelphia, 1922. On p. 124, Bamberger discusses Isha's encounter with Metatron, but he does not attempt to interpret the account as light of fallen angel traditions. The relationship of the fallen angel tradition, the tradition of a heavenly ruler who claimed to be a god, and the Antichrist tradition, cf. A. Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (Macon, 1977), p. 18, with pp. 19-21, 162, with a note on 18-19, 81. See N. Dahl, *The Antichrist Problem*, pp. 203-205. David Halperin, *Awakening: Imagined Journeys of the Heavenly Journey in Ancient Jewish Religion* (1968), interprets the ascension traditions concerning Moses and Metatron as positive structural variations of the negative tradition of Lucifer's ascent and subsequent downfall. On p. 56, Halperin writes: "To sum up the ascending hero's fall of his avatar, Enoch-Metatron-Moses and Lucifer-Metatron (as Lucifer viewed) in time is a positive ascent and perpetuation through Lucifer is thrown down to Sheol, to the depth of the pit. Moses vanquishes the angel and grasps the throne of God. Metatron denies Moses success as a figure that matches Lucifer's fantasy." Halperin does not mention the tradition of Metatron's own demotion, which seems to echo the downfall of Lucifer. Consequently, he only portrays Metatron's enthronement in heaven as a positive motif, whereas it was clearly viewed negatively or at least ambiguously by some sources.

⁴ See the parallels in *The Life of Adam and Eve* 5:2. For other sources of 2 E 1, Andersen, "Samaritan Apocalypse of Enoch," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. 1, p. 149, nn. 4, 5.

angels may have been intensified by 1 Enoch 12-13, where Enoch intercedes on behalf of the fallen angels.

As a segue into the next chapter, a final parallel to the downfall of Metatron may be found in Gnostic traditions concerning the Demiurge or what Nils Dahl has called "The Myth of the Arrogant Ruler."¹⁹ As Dahl and other scholars have argued, the downfall of the Gnostic Demiurge commonly known as Ildabaoth, Samael, or Saklas, is also related to the forementioned biblical and intertestamental traditions concerning the haughty human or angelic being who falsely claims to be a god.

Like Metatron, the Demiurge is rebuked in a number of Gnostic texts by "a voice from above" which declares "You are mistaken, Samael," or "Do not be, Ildabaoth."²⁰ Unlike the Aher/Metatron tradition which emphasizes the unique authority of the biblical God, the Gnostic sources actually seek to undermine the God of the Bible by identifying him with the Demiurge. The point of the Aher/Metatron tradition is to differentiate Metatron from the God of Judaism; the point of the Gnostic sources is to differentiate the God of Israel i.e. the Demiurge from the higher God of the Pleroma. Despite their divergent theologies, the Gnostic and Jewish sources resemble one another in a very important respect: both function as polemics against a lower figure who may be easily mistaken for the one, true God.

In the next chapter, I will examine two vice-regent figures, Sabaoth and Anathur, who like Azrael in 5:97 and Metatron in 3 Enoch 16, are depicted as judges enthroned at the entrance of the divine dwelling. The existence of this cross-cultural phenomenon may have influenced the authors of the Talmudic version of the Aher/Metatron tradition to polemize against such a figure within Jewish circles. The closeness of the Hekhalot depictions of Metatron

¹⁹ Cf. Dahl, "The Arrogant Archon," pp. 701ff. Cf. also, Fallon, *The Enthronement of Sabaoth*, p. 20ff.; Bernard Bar, *L'Hypothèse des 4. fonts: l'acte Gnostique sur l'Origine de l'Homme du Monde et des Archons*, NH II 4, Quebec/Louvain, 1980, p. 34.

²⁰ Cf. *Hypostases of the Archons* 86:32-87:4; 94:24-26; 95:5-7. *On the Origin of the World* 103:15-18; Irenaeus, Haer. 1:30.6. Dahl, "The Arrogant Archon," pp. 693-694, includes the rebuke of the Demiurge as part of the pattern of the myth of the arrogant ruler in Gnosticism.

²¹ "The Arrogant Archon," pp. 706-707. As Dahl writes, "The mythopoetic polemic is not directed against an earthly ruler against the symbol of or eschatological adversary of the people of God, or against the religious hero of a heretical group, but against the God of monotheistic opponents."

and Akatriet to the Gnostic and Mandaeen traditions could easily have raised the suspicions of the Talmud's authors. Rather than explicitly declaring that belief in an enthroned vice regent was heretical, however, they may have formulated a far more subtle attack. Even in his avatar as a scribe allowed to sit in heaven to write down Israel's merits and not as a glorious, enthroned vice regent, Metatron was a dangerous figure whose appearance could cause confusion and lead to heresy. Aher then becomes the symbol of those Jews whose ditheistic or binitarian belief in an angelic vice regent too closely resembles the beliefs of Gnostics and Mandaeans. Perhaps even the reference to "no standing and no sitting," appearing in the earliest Talmudic manuscripts reflects this polemical context for as Michael Williams has shown standing was a positive sign of stability in many Gnostic sources. As *Zostoros* declares "I became a root-seeing angel and stood upon the first aeon which is the fourth. . . I stood upon the second aeon which is the third. . . I stood upon the third aeon which is the second." (*Zostrano*: 6.20.7-10). Thus, in its most conservative formulation the Talmudic episode attacks both heavenly enthronement and the tradition of standing in heaven, actions which are linked to angelification or divinization in Gnostic and Hekhalot sources alike. I conclude this discussion with a final tradition concerning Metatron. The passage appears in the midrashic collection called *Lamentations Rabbah* and follows a description of God lamenting the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the exile of his Shekinah.

At this moment Metatron entered and fell on his face and said before Him: Master of the Universe, I will cry so that you don't have to cry. He (God) replied: If you don't let me cry now I will enter a place where you don't have the authority *reshut* to enter and I will cry as it is said: If you do not heed My sons will weep in the secret places because of your arrogance [Jeremiah 13:7]. *Lamentations Rabbah*: 4.

In this poignant encounter Metatron bows down to God as a sign of respect, a sharp contrast to his action in the Aher/Metatron tradition. At first glance Metatron's suggestion that he weep in God's stead appears to reflect positively on Metatron: he is volunteering to perform an activity which is either painful or

¹ Michael Williams, *The Immovable Race: A Gnostic Designation and the Theme of Stability* (Leiden: 1985).

inappropriate for God. And yet God's response hints that Metatron may have overstepped his boundaries once again. Rather than accepting Metatron's offer, God tells Metatron that unless he leaves him in peace, God will retreat to a place where Metatron is unable to follow. The Hebrew term used is the same word employed by Aher in his infamous "two powers" statement. Whether or not we hear an echo of the Aher/Metatron tradition in God's response, it is clear that Metatron has been rebuked for assuming too much authority. This is also suggested by the biblical proof text which in the original context refers to Israel's "arrogance" as the source of God's sadness, while in the midrashic re-telling Metatron's arrogance has become the catalyst for God removing himself to a hidden place to cry. Once again, Metatron has literally been put in this place.

Indeed, this powerful passage argues that God, rather than Metatron — the angel typically in charge of Israel — will personally incur for the destruction of his Temple and the exile of his Presence from his people. By affirming that God, and not Metatron, will mourn, the text rejects the importance of intermediaries and argues instead for the primacy of the direct relationship between God and Israel, even as it describes the catastrophe (the destruction of the Temple) which threatens this relationship. Thus, we have seen texts which treat Metatron as a positive symbol of the human ability to reach the distance with God; others which understand Metatron as a threat to what they consider the proper boundaries between God and his creatures; and still others which imply that Metatron functions as an obstacle in the way of a direct relationship between God and people, as in this final passage.

CHAPTER FIVE

ABATHUR'S LAMENT

Like Merkabah mysticism, Mandaeanism and Gnosticism developed their own myths of vice regency, incorporating many of the same themes and transforming a common pool of biblical and apocalyptic traditions. As in the case of the Jewish sources, Gnostic and Mandaean texts depict the vice regent as a figure who both crosses and reinforces boundaries and categories. Examining these traditions, we encounter similar motifs of ascension and transformation, expulsion and rehabilitation. In the following chapters, I will focus on two vice regent figures, Abathur and Sabaoth. Because the Gnostic figure Sabaoth and the texts he appears in have already been examined in great detail, I will emphasize in particular his parallels with Metatron and Abathur. By contrast, I will provide an extensive portrait of the Mandaean figure Abathur who has received relatively little scholarly attention until now.

Many early scholars of Mandaean literature, including Eric Lidzbarski, Richard Reitzenstein and Rudolph Bultman postulated a pre-Christian Palestinian origin for Mandaeanism. This view gains support from the *The Haran Gnostica*, which contains the Mandaean's own account of their forced migration from Palestine to Mesopotamia. More recently, Kurt Rudolph has suggested a "Jewish-Palestine-Pre-Christian" theory of Mandaean origin,² and has written that "Even the oldest form of that which we today call Mandaeanism was a splintering off from official Judaism."³ Edwin Yamauchi has offered the strongest challenge to this position, arguing instead that the origin of Mandaeanism lies in a Transjordan or "western proto-Mandaean component" of "non-Jews" possibly sharing an ideology similar to that of the Ebionite sect, who migrated to Mesopotamia and combined their form of Gnosticism

² For discussions of the various positions see Kurt Rudolph, "Problems of a History of the Development of the Mandaean Religion," *History of Religions* 8, 1969, pp. 210-231.

³ Kurt Rudolph, *Die Mandäer I: Prolegomena, Das Mandäerproblem, Die Mandäer II: Der Kult*.

⁴ "Problems of a History of the Development of the Mandaean Religion," p. 228.

with an indigenous group, as he writes: "It was this fruitful union of the vitality of Gnosticism and the tenacity of Mesopotamian cult and magic that resulted in the birth of a hardy new religion perhaps by the end of the second century AD."¹

Determining the date and provenance of the many works which comprise the Mandaean library is notoriously difficult.² The most extensive and, from a theological point of view, richest Mandaean texts, such as the *Ginza Raba*, the *Book of John*, and the *Canonical Prayerbook*, are compositions of chronologically and theologically disparate elements.³ The oldest stratum of these works are the liturgical hymns contained in the *Canonical Prayerbook*, which probably date from the third century C.E. The *Ginza* and *Book of John* were first redacted in the early Islamic period. The earliest figure appearing in the colophons of Mandaean works is a scribe named Laza d'Gawazia, son of Natar and Hawwa, who is said to have copied the hymns in the *Canonical Prayerbook* "from the scroll of the first asc." Many Mandaean scrolls written in the medieval period and later claim to trace their origin to this figure, who lived in the second half of the third century C.E. The systematic analysis of the Mandaean colophons is currently being undertaken by Jorunn Jacobsen Buckley, whose work will undoubtedly shed much light on the development of Mandaean literature.

The highly redacted nature of Mandaean literature recalls the literary character of Hekhalot texts which, as Peter Schäfer has

¹ Yamauchi, *The Christian Gnosticism*, pp. 140-1.

² On the critical study of Mandaean literature see Svend Aage Pade, *Essay on Mandaean Bibliography 1860-1940* (London/Copenhagen, 1933); Rudolf Macuch, *Zur Sprache und Literatur der Mandäer. Mit Beiträgen von K. Rudolph und F. Vogelberg* (Berlin, 1924); *Stylus Mandaicus* (Basil, 1925); Wolfgang, *Der Mandäismus* (Darmstadt, 1942); esp. Sec. 5, "Liturgische Fragen"; K. A. Rieu, *The Mandaean Prayerbook*, this *Mandaean problem*, Cambridge, 1940. Also worthwhile are the introductory comments of E. S. Drower in her editions of Mandaean texts.

³ The standard edition of the *Ginza Raba* (also called *Sutra Raba*) is that of M. Lidzbarski, *Ginza. Der Schatz oder das große Buch der Mandäer* (Göttingen, 1926). H. Peckmann also publishes an edition in a theological series as *Thesaurus, wie über magnum Leipzig*, 867. The *Book of John* (Mand. *Kitab d'Yahia*, also known as *Phadia d'Abd'el*) or *Book of the Kings* appears in Lidzbarski's *Das Johanneische Buch der Mandäer* (2 volumes, Göttingen, 1913 and 1915; reprint, Berlin, 1965). The *Canonical Prayerbook* is the name given by E. S. Drower to her *Quarta*, a collection of Mandaean liturgical passages; E. S. Drower, *The Canonical Prayerbook of the Mandaeans* (Leiden, 1949; see also Lidzbarski's edition, *Mandäische Liturgien*, Berlin, 1920; reprint, Hildesheim, 1962).

For a discussion of these issues see R. Macuch, "Anfänge der Mandäer," in R. Althaus and R. Stuhl, eds., *Die Araber in der alten Welt*, Berlin, 1965; and "Preface" in J. J. Buckley, *The Scroll of Enoch's Kingdom (Dunne Malkuta Latta)*, New Haven, 1963.

argued, are actually compilations of smaller literary units or traditions. In response to the complex nature of Mandaean sources, scholars have developed a number of criteria for determining the age and compositional milieu of specific literary units. These critical indicators include the mention of baptismal practices, Jewish doctrines and practices, polemical references, parallels with Gnostic and Christian literature, and linguistic usages.⁸

Generally the correlation between Mandaean practices and beliefs with those of early baptismal groups such as the *Encratites* is taken as an indication of an early, that is, pre-Islamic, or even pre-Christian origin. Likewise parallels between Mandaean and Jewish, Christian and/or Gnostic sources are often interpreted as signs of an early date. The presence of polemics against Christianity and Judaism, but not against Islam, is considered an indication of a pre-Islamic provenance. By contrast the use of Arabic names, rather than their traditional Mandaic counterparts, e.g. *Allah*, for the highest God; *Tahyd*, for John) may signify a post-Islamic date.

Unfortunately, the determination of a particular literary unit's date and provenance on the basis of these criteria often proves to be highly problematic. For example, the conspicuous absence of a polemic against Islam may have more to do with the fear of Muslim reprisal than a pre-Islamic origin, while the use of an Arabic name such as *Tahya* instead of the Mandaic *Tahanna* may indicate a late redactional change made to a compositionally early passage. Because of this uncertainty many scholars have focused on reconstructing the phenomenological character of Mandaean religion, rather than its precise literary development. As Kurt Rudolph has written:

It is very difficult to get a clear picture of these religious ideas from Mandaean literature. It has therefore not yet been possible to reconstruct the evolution of Mandaean ideas from their earliest beginnings with any certainty. Here, I can do no more than to give a short phenomenological outline of the main current of religious ideas in this literature.⁹

Elsewhere, however, Rudolph has argued that certain phenomenological criteria may help us ascertain the evolution of Mandaean theology. In his opinion the chief phenomenological

⁸ On the related issues of dating Mandaean literary sources and the Mandaeans themselves, see the survey in Edwin Yamauchi, *Gnostic Ethics and Mandaean Origins*, pp. 4-10.

⁹ Kurt Rudolph, *Mandaeism*, Leiden, 1972, p. 12.

shift in Mandaean theology is from an earlier radical dualism to a more monistic view, a hypothesis which I will examine more closely below.¹⁰ Despite the great variety of Mandaean traditions, Rudolph cautions that Mandaeism "cannot be characterized as a simple mosaic of individual sects or ideas. It is, as Macuch recently emphasized again, a unified phenomenon."¹¹ In examining the Mandaean figure of Abathur I will adopt both of Rudolph's methodological principles, namely, his focus on phenomenology and his acceptance of the underlying coherence of Mandaean sources.

One of the unifying themes of Mandaean theology is its emphasis on the divine and semi-divine beings who populate the various levels of the Mandaean universe. Although studies of Mandaean religion have never kept pace with the plethora of Mandaean theological figures, a number of works have been devoted to examining particular beings. The Mandaean Primal Adam or Anthropos has now received the most scholarly attention, with relevant studies produced by Kraening, Drower, Quispel, and Cohn-Sherbok.¹² Although Kraening noted the parallels between the Mandaean Anthropos and Jewish and Gnostic traditions, he traced the origin of the phenomenon to Iranian religion. By contrast, more recent studies have emphasized the dependence of the Mandaean figure on Jewish conceptions.

Earlier in the century, when scholars were more intent on showing the influence of Mandaeism on early Christianity, the Mandaean figure of John the Baptist and the savior figure Parohi were frequently compared with Christian portrayals of Jesus.¹³ In roughly

¹⁰ Cf. Rudolph, *Theologie, Kosmologie und Anthropologie in den mandäischen Schriften* (Göttingen, 1965), pp. 136-138, 341ff.

¹¹ Rudolph, "Prolegomena of a History of the Development of the Mandaean Religion," pp. 234-235, quoting R. Macuch, "Anfänge der Mandaer," p. 170.

¹² Carl H. Kraening, *Anthropos and Son of Man: A Study in the Religious Syncretism of the Hellenistic Orient* (New York, 1957; reprint New York, 1966); E. S. Drower, *The Secret Adam: A Study of Sumerian Genesis* (Oxford, 1940); G. Quispel, *Jewish Gnosticism and Mandaeism* (Groningen), in J. E. Menard, ed., *Les Textes de Nag Hammadi* (Leiden, 1973); Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *The Alphabet in Mandaean and Jewish Cosmology: Religion I* (1981) (Leiden). For the links Mandaean and Heterodox Judaism, see *Rohrbach's Perspective on the New Testament* (Leicester, 1980).

¹³ This typological view has been advanced by R. Reizenstein and his *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* (disputed). *Das mandäische Buch des Herrn Ursepe und die Evangelienmattäuslieferung* (Hamburg, 1934); idem, *Die Frage der hebr. Evangelienlieferung* (Leipzig, 1929). See also G. R. S. Mead, *The Gnostic John the Baptist: Selection from the Mandaean John Book* (London, 1924); Frank Cross, *The Mandaean John and the Gospel Tradition* (London Theological Seminary, New York, 1959). Dissertations: When Portuguese missionaries started sending reports back to Europe on the Mandaeans (1679

the same period. Kraching devoted an article to the etymology and origin of the Mandaean demiturge Ptahil.¹ During this early phase of Mandaean research, general studies and editions of Mandaean texts often contained brief comments on the character and origin of Mandaean theological figures. More recently, Kurt Rudolph has devoted large portions of his now classic *Theogonie, Kosmogonie und Anthropogonie in den mandäischen Schriften*, to examining the various actors in the Mandaean cosmogonic drama. Finally, mention must be made of the current work being done by Jorunn Jacobson Buckley, who has devoted a number of highly interesting studies rehabilitating the often maligned figure of Ruha.²

It should be stressed that Abathur is not the only Mandaean figure who possesses characteristics of a vice regent. For example, Hiba Zwa Manda d Hayya, and Ptahil each have vice regent features, some of which have already been noted in earlier studies.³ Nevertheless, Abathur not only possesses the greatest number of

encountered in the area around Basra during the 17th century, they referred to them as "Christians of St. Joannis," or "Christians of St. John," cf. Eric Segelberg, "Old and New Testament Figures in Mandaean Version," in Sven Hartman, ed. *Amman* (Stockholm 1969) Ch. p. 234. Segelberg speculates that the reason why Jesus Christ was never revered and absorbed and Mandaeized was that the Mandaeans were "a strictly Jewish and monotheistic sect who, even in close contact with Syrian Christianity, did not know of Jesus Christ as God incarnate and therefore their own theology allow a Mandaean translation of him."

Carl Kraching, "The Mandaean God Ptahil," *Journal of the American Christian Society* 53, 1934.

See J. J. Buckley, "The Mandaean Sir as an Example of The Image Above and Below," *Numer* 26, 1971; idem, "Two Female Genes in Revelation," *History of Religions* 19, 1980; idem, "A Rehabilitation of Spirit Ruha in Mandaean Religion," *History of Religions* 21, 1982; idem, "Female Fault and Fulfillment in Gnosticism," Chicago, Ill. and London, 1986. For a full recent view of Ruha as a demon story, cf. M. V. Cocchi, "Purification of Ruha: per una fenomenologia del demonismo mandaico," *Numer* 24, 1977.

1. C. H. Odeberg, *Enoch*, pp. 64-65. Odeberg also notes some parallels between Abathur and Metatron, which I will examine below. For a discussion of Odeberg's parallels see James Brindley's "Prolegomena to the History of Odeberg's work," in p. xxxv. Greenfield writes, "The parallels which Odeberg offered are mostly verbal and are on the whole meaningless." While Greenfield correctly characterizes many of Odeberg's suggestions, he is too broad in his criticism. In several instances, Odeberg's notes and comparative studies juxtaposing parallel passages from Mandaean literature and *Enoch* substantiate Odeberg's own analysis of these passages as meaningful. See also Ferguson's discussion of Ptahil in *The Name of God and the Image of the Lord*, pp. 75-76. Ferguson states, "the Mandaean identification of Ptahil with the archangel Gabriel, and argues that the Mandaean concept of the demiturge Gabriel must derive from Jewish sources, contra Rudolph following S. A. Paulus, who asserts that the figure of Gabriel in Mandaeanism is derived from Islam," cf. *Theogonie, Kosmogonie und Anthropogonie*, pp. 199ff.

these characteristics but also most closely resembles the other vice regent figures I have already examined.

Abathur as Creature Light Being

According to Mandaean mythology Abathur is originally an emanation of the unknown High God, who is called 'Life' *haiye*, 'Great Life' *haiye rubbe* and 'Lord of Greatness' *marā drabuta* in the earliest texts and the "King of Light" *malika dnhura* in later sources. The stages of divine emanation are commonly referred to as the "Second," "Third," and "Fourth Life" but are also known by the corresponding personal names Yohannan Abathur, and Ptahil. As the *Canonical Prayer Book of the Mandaeans* states: "The First Life is anterior to the Second Life by six thousand myriad years and the Second Life anterior to the Third Life by six thousand myriad years and the Third Life more ancient than any 'athra by six thousand myriad years."⁴ Together these divine beings make up the World of Light *alma d'nhura*. Parallel to the World of Light is a World of Darkness *alma d'hsuka* inhabited by a pantheon of beings including the ambivalent female figure Raha and her monstrous son Ur.

As the light is emanated its quality decreases so that the Second Life is inferior to the First Life and so forth. In a number of sources, a process of degeneration occurs as the Second Life, Yohannan turns towards the World of Darkness. The Third Life Abathur who is also called B'harq-iwa, accelerates the process of degeneration by gazing into the 'black' or 'turbid' waters which form the

⁴ The most extensive and best examination of Abathur until now appears in Rudolph, *Theogonie, Kosmogonie und Anthropogonie*, esp., pp. 121-133. Until Rudolph's work, most speculation on Abathur concerned the etymologies of his name which I will examine below. Brief discussions of Abathur may be found in Wilhelm Brandt, *Die mandäische Religion, ihre Entwicklung und geschichtliche Bedeutung*, Leipzig, 1889, pp. 7, ff.; idem, *Das Schicksal der Seele nach dem Tode nach mandäischen und parmanischen Vorstellungen*, *Zeitschriften für protestantische Theologie* 18-1892 reprint with epilogue by G. Wainwright, Darmstadt 1961, pp. 77-79; H. Jona, *Gnostica und spätantiker Gnostizismus*, pp. 2-3; E. M. Lutzbarsch, *Das Jenseitsbuch der Mandäer*, pp. xxv-xxx; E. S. Drower, *The Mithras of Iraq and Iran*, 95 n. 1 + idem, *The Secret Adam*, pp. 64-65; R. Macalister, *Handbook of Assyrian and Modern Mandaean*, Beirut 1967, pp. 2-3, 24. I have recently examined several aspects of Abathur in *The Gnostic Imaginative*, pp. 199-227. Abathur: A New Examination, in J. Coillart and M. Fishbane, eds. *Death, Fantasy and Other Worldly Journeys*, Albany 1995, pp. 169-179.

⁵ E. S. Drower, *The Canonical Prayer Book of the Mandaeans*, p. 1.

lower boundary of the World of Light. By gazing below, Abathur commits an act of extreme hubris and even rebellion, for the proper focus of the emanated beings is on the Great Life, above. Like Sophia's rebellion in the western Gnostic myths, Abathur's gazing results in the creation of the demiurge Ptahil who forms the physical world *abih*. As the *Gunza Ruba* states:

Abathur arose, opened the gate (of the World of Light, and gazed into the black waters, and immediately his counterpart was formed in the black waters. Ptahil was formed and ascended to the boundary..... Abathur instructed him and said: 'Arise, my son, condense a condensation in the black water.'

In another version of the cosmogonic drama, the rebellious character of Abathur's action is emphasized:

Shaq-Zawa (i.e. Abathur) stood by himself and he held himself to be a mighty one. He held himself to be a mighty one and abandoned the name that his father had called him by. And he spoke: 'I am the father of the utras. The father of the utras and I made shkanas for the utras. He contemplated the turbid water and said: "I shall call forth a world." He took no advice and did not perceive the turbid water.

He called Ptahil-utras, embraced him, and kissed him like a mighty one. He bestowed names on him which are hidden and protected at their place. He gave him the name 'Gabriel, the Messenger.' He called him *ommandee* and spoke to him: 'Arise, go, descend to the place where there are no shkanas or words. Call forth and create a world for yourself just like the sons of perfection, whom you saw.'

As a result of his rebellious involvement in the creation, Abathur is condemned as the one "from whom imperfection originated from him imperfection came into being and he sowed bad seed (i.e. Ptahil). Bad seed did he sow and created creations not worthy of

* Mark Lidzbarski, *Or. a.*, p. 174. Rudolph discusses this passage in *Theogonie, Kosmogonie und Anthropogonie*, p. 76.

¹⁰ *Gunza*, pp. 97 ff. This passage is also examined in *Theogonie, Kosmogonie und Anthropogonie*, pp. 121-22. For another version of Abathur's role in the cosmogony, cf. E. S. Drower, *Dutan Abathur or Progress Through the Purgatories*, Vauclano, 1950, pp. 111 ff. Besides Rudolph, Mari Cornea has most thoroughly examined the Mandaeic cosmogonic traditions. *Thaumatoz antigata. Comptes rendus de la session de la doctrine mandaeique*, *Princeton, Office Adams*, vol. 3, 1981. E. S. Drower, *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran*, pp. 238 ff. has also attempted to make sense of the confusing variety of Mandaean cosmogonic traditions.

him who asked no advice." Abathur's ultimate punishment is his dethronement and exile from the World of Light. Following this event Abathur is installed at the entrance of the World of Light, where he receives a new throne and functions as the weigher and judge of human souls as *The Canonical Prayerbook* declares, "he [Abathur] is fallen from his throne, why from his throne he is fallen and went and became He-of-the-Scales."¹ Another text, recently published by J. J. Buckley called *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship Dathan Malkata Laila* describes Abathur's fall from grace as follows: "So Abatur Rama, whose child is the world, is degraded from his throne degraded, and he went to become 'He-of-the-Scales'."²

Abathur's Dethronement

The most dramatic account of Abathur's installation as the weigher of souls is preserved in the *Mandaeen Book of John* in a section called "Abathurs Kraige" (Abathur's Lament by Ladjbarski).³ After being ordered to leave his pleomorphic home and take up the position of judge and weigher of souls, Abathur complains: "Why have you

¹ *The Canonical Prayerbook*, p. 98; E. S. Drower, *The Great "First World" in A Pair of Nestorian Commentaries: Two Peshito Documents: The Great "First World" and The Lesser "First World"* (Leiden, 1901), p. 4, declares that "when Yushamin comes into existence deficiency and imperfection will emanate with him."

² *The Canonical Prayerbook*, p. 149. The location of Abathur's new throne is described in *The Canonical Prayerbook*, p. 7, as follows: "[Abathur] is now seated at the gate of the House of Life." E. S. Drower, *The Peshito and the Questions in the Talmud* (Berlin, 1904), p. 13, English, p. 45, Mandaeen. Abathur is viewed below the treacherous waters which separate the World of Light from the various "watchhouses" or mystical water-creation as waystations or purgatories for the ascending soul: "And the world of Abathur is below the world of the evil winged waters [hapiqa naa], and the world of outflowing waters below the world of the pure Yushamin."

³ J. J. Buckley, *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship*, p. 38. "Abathurs Kraige" comprises pp. 2-234, see 70-77, of Ladjbarski's *Das Johannes buch der Mandäer*. For another less critical account of Abathur's installation below the world of light, cf. E. S. Drower, *Datan Atake Katanu* 950 ff. 2. "Then Hibil Ziwa went and said to Abatur, 'Arise! set up thy throne in the House of Bounties and take over sovereignty. And Mimate [at which is some good from that which is base when Man's measure is full and he cometh into is baptised in the Jordan, is weighed in Scales, sealed with his Seal and set up and dwelleth in thy world]' Then Abatur spoke and saith to Hibil Ziwa: 'Thou hast arranged for me, (that I was obliged to leave) my land that is lofty and my spouse who are worthy and suitable, and ye brought me and made me 'He-of-the-Scales'."

made me the Scaleman out of all the uthras. I have been forced out from my shkna, so that my worm is destroyed and desecrated and is deprived to me." Hibil Ziwa, a divine emissary, then ascends to his father, the Life, a name for the highest god, and informs him that Abathur has refused to assume his position as weigher of souls or Scaleman. Upon hearing this, the King (i.e. Life or Great Life) becomes angry and calls out two times, only to have his call muffled by the shkna. The third time the King calls out, a jester bring, Šām, responds that he will assume the position of Scaleman. The King responds to Šām's suggestion by calling him a fool and declaring that "Abathur is called, who is a gentle uthra."

Section 72 begins with a confrontation between Abathur and the Māna.⁵ Once again, Abathur asks why he has been chosen from among all the uthras. Mana responds that "Among all the shkna and uthras there is none like you. None in these light worlds who would be so gentle as you. You are gentle and you are a qualified uthra. You are so courageous and you are a bulwark to the souls. You feel sympathy with the souls and you are an acceptable judge." To this Abathur responds that Hibil Ziwa should be judge and he will be Scaleman.

The account concludes with a confusing series of role reversals between Hibil Ziwa and Abathur. Upon discovering that Abathur has convinced Hibil Ziwa to become the weigher of souls while he, Abathur, has assumed Hibil Ziwa's role as king of the shkna, the Great Life throws Abathur off his throne:

After that Abathur said to Mana: "Tell Hibil-Ziwa that he will be the judge and I will be the Scaleman. So then Hibil Ziwa-Yawar turned to Abathur and said: "If I become judge, who should maintain the shkna? If I become judge who should become king in these worlds?" To that Abathur answered: "I will become king and I will maintain the shkna." When Abathur said this Hibil-Yawar clenched and became the Scaleman. When Hibil Ziwa said this, the Great Life took him into the Good and against Abathur did the Great Life become full of anger. The Great Life came and threw him [Abathur] off his throne and placed him by the gate of the Sufat

⁵ Ibid., p. 233. In Mandaean cosmology the uthras or divine beings of the World of Light inhabit dwelling places called shkna.

⁶ Here the name Mana may refer to the highest god, i.e. Life, Great Life, King, cf. Luccharet's comments in *ibid.*, p. 233, n. 8. Otherwise, the term may designate an individual member of a class of heavenly beings, cf. Rudolph's comments in *Gnostic A Selection of Texts*, p. 146.

[*ibaba u'sufat*, "Go," he said to him, "be the judge as long as the Great [Life] desires it from you."

This version of Abathur's dethronement has much in common with the dethronement of Metatron in the Jewish sources I examined above. In both traditions, an enthroned figure who threatens the proper divisions within the cosmic hierarchy is punished by being forced off his throne. Synopse §672, in particular, parallels the Mandaean account since Metatron is exiled outside of Pardes and placed at its entrance just as Abathur is placed at the gate of the *Sufat*. "Immediately they brought out Metatron to outside the Curtain (*Pargod*) and struck him with sixty fiery lashes." In both Mandaean and Merkabah accounts, enthronement functions as the most potent symbol of divine authority. Dethronement, therefore, serves an opposite function, signifying that a lower divine figure does not have the same power or authority as God. In their desire to go beyond their own status and imitate God, Abathur and Metatron are guilty of hubris. This emerges explicitly in the Mandaean account where Abathur declares that he seeks to become "king of the *shkinas*," and implicitly in the Jewish sources where Metatron does not stand up when he sees Aher.

The relationship between Abathur and Hibil Ziwa in this text is confusing, probably reflecting the fact that although the two figures are often portrayed as separate beings in Mandaean literature, indeed, they interact with one another in a number of places. In some sources it appears that Hibil Ziwa and Abathur are actually the same being, a phenomenon already noted by Drower.¹⁸ Thus, for example, the *Diwan Abatur* alternately depicts Pihil as the son of Abathur and of Hibil Ziwa. "Abathur's Lament" appears to flirt with the idea that Abathur and Hibil Ziwa are identical beings and that they are separate.

A final point concerns the depiction of Hibil Ziwa as a judge and weigher of souls in "Abathur's Lament." Hibil is the Mandaean version of the biblical name Abel. In the *Testament of Abraham*, a text with many parallels with the Aher/Metatron tradition, Abel is depicted as an enthroned judge, surrounded by angels who record

¹⁸ "Sufat" is the name of an underworld. See E. S. Drower and R. Macuch, *A Mandaean Dictionary*, Oxford, 1963, p. 323.

¹⁹ E. S. Drower, *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran*, p. 95, n. 4, where she refers to "Abathur Rama, an epithet for Hibil Ziwa," and Hibil Ziwa, sometimes identified with Abathur.

and weigh the souls. "And the wondrous man [Aber] who sat on the throne was the one who judged and sentenced the souls. And the one [Dokiel] who was in front of the table who was holding the balance, weighed the souls."²⁷ This same cluster of themes appears in "Abathur's Lament" where the functions of judging and weighing souls pass back and forth between Abathur and Hibil-Ziwa. As in the case of the Aher/Metatron tradition, it is possible that such parallels are coincidental or that *The Testament of Abraham* influenced the formulation of the Mandaean tradition concerning a cosmic figure named Hiwil (=Abel), enthroned in heaven as a judge.

Abathur as Priest

Although "Abathur's Lament" preserves the tradition of Abathur's exile from the World of Light, it does not portray Abathur in an entirely negative light. Abathur is a rebellious divar figure, but, as Radolph has noted in his analysis of the account, Abathur is also characterized in more positive priestly terminology and imagery. Thus, for example, the depiction of Abathur as a king of the shkinas evokes the common Mandaean tradition of referring to priests by the title of "king" (*malika*).²⁸

In his study of heavenly baptism and enthronement in Mandaeism, Geo Widengren has argued that the Mandaean depiction of the priest as king ultimately derives from Jewish sources such as *Test. Abr.* 8:1-12, where the enthroned priest is described in royal imagery. As Widengren writes: "We are reminded of the fact that the priest also is called *malika*, king [in Mandaean writings]."²⁹ Abathur's priestly

²⁷ "Testament of Abraham," Recension A, ch. 12, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, p. 889.

²⁸ Cf. *Thesaurus Numismaticus und Anthropologicus*, p. 136, n. 1. The identification of human and heavenly priests as kings is most evident in the Mandaean text *The Coronation of the Great Sisman*, ca. E 5. DeWeert, *The Coronation of the Great Sisman: Being a Description of the Rite of the Coronation of a Mandaean Priest according to the Ancient Canon*, London, 1967. Also see J. J. Buckley, "The Meaning of a Mandaean Priest: The Faruda Initiation," *Nomon* 32, 1985. Eric Segelberg, "Trana d-Yaga d-Sisman Rabba: Studies in the Rite Called the Coronation of Sisman Rabba," in *Zur Sprache und Literatur der Mandaer*, E. S. DeWeert, *A Part of Mandaean Literature*, p. ix, writes: "The spirits *aditas* who enact such rites are kings, but as priests are also kings."

²⁹ Geo Widengren, "Heavenly Enthronement and Baptism: Studies in Mandaean Baptism," in J. Neuser, ed., *Religion in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erich Romsdell Goodenough*, Leiden, 1968, pp. 556-559. Widengren frequently emphasizes the influence of Syrian-Mesopotamian ritual traditions on Mandaean baptism and

functions are evident in other Mandaean texts where he is depicted as performing heavenly rituals analogous to the rituals of human priests. Thus, for example, in the text known as *The Great 'First World'* the earthly priest is instructed "And when thou sayest 'thou shalt go and reach the guard-house of four beings—sons of perfection' those are the four ritual handclasps *kashut* which Abathur seeks to exchange with the soul."⁵ And, even more strikingly, in *The Lesser 'First World'*, we read

And when thou takes the iron knife into thy hand, thou hast placed Prabil's hand into Abatur's hand with thy right hand. And when thou takes the sheep or the dove and turnest thy face towards the Gate of Prayer, Abatur-of-the-Scales gazes upon thee.⁶

Indeed, there is a direct correspondence between the rituals performed by the priests on earth and the heavenly rituals performed by the priestly *uthras*. On the one hand—as F. S. Drower has argued, the rites and sacraments which, performed in the ether-world by 'uthras, were to serve as archetypes for earthly baptisms, masses, and commemorations.⁷ On the other hand, the relationship between the earthly and heavenly rituals appears to be theurgical, that is, the actions of the human priests actually influence parallel behavior in the divine realm. Thus at one point in the priestly ritual known as the *Tabahata-masqta* "Parents' Death Mass" the earthly priests exchange the handshake or *kashla* and declare "May *Aschta* strengthen you, my brother—*uthras*. The living have been joined in communion, just as '*uthras* in their *shkutas* are joined in communion. Pleasing is your fragrance, my brothers, in your innermost, that is all full of radiance."⁸

In another ritual, this time the initiation of the low-level priest or *tarmida*, the relationship between the actions of human priests and the light beings, including Abathur, is spelled out as follows: "Wær-

enthronement rites. Other studies of Mandaean baptism include, E. Segeberg, *Mashuta: Studies on the Ritual of the Mandaean Baptism* (Uppsala, 1958); J. J. Buckley, "Why Once is not Enough: Mandaean Baptism (*Mashuta*) as an Example of a Repeated Ritual History of Religion," 9, 1989; Margitta Franzmann, "Living Water: Meaningful Element in Mandaean Myth and Ritual," *Numer* 9, 1989.

⁵ *A Pair of Nasoreen Commentaries*, p. 35.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 22. See also Drower's comments in her *Water into Wine*, London, 1956, p. 253.

⁸ *A Pair of Nasoreen Commentaries*, p. 21. For a detailed study of the Mandaean rite of *kashla*, see Waldemar Sundberg, *Aschta: A Monograph on a Principle Word in Mandaean Texts*, Lund, 1933.

you recite this *nuṣṣa* over the sea-ring of the novice, then earth, skies, sun moon stars, constellations and Raba and the Seven and Ptahil, Abatur and the four beings, sons of perfection, and all *utras* of the world of light bow down and worship him, saying, 'Go, go, be watchful and be established until the earth comes to nought!'"³⁸

J. J. Buckley eloquently expresses this dialectic between earthly and heavenly actions in Mandaean myth and ritual:

The presentation of the *masiqta* shows that spoken words accompanied by pertinent acts have a creative effect and that these words and acts affect the upper worlds. Modeled after the rituals of the primordial beings in the Light-world, the priests' actions recreate these ceremonies. The Light beings send down prayers and rituals so that they might be carried out on earth. But the *utras* themselves perform these rituals above too. This reciprocity breaks the borderlines between Light-world and earth, and the earthly *utras* work because the priests are essentially *utras* on earth.³⁹

Along with Abatur, other divine figures who are frequently portrayed as priests in Mandaean mythology include Yohannan and Ptahil, whom I will discuss below, the Secret Adam or Adam Kasia who is portrayed as the First Priest, and Slsam Raba, who is depicted as the chief archetype of proper priesthood.⁴⁰ As Drower has noted, a major valence of the priesthood is its mediating function between the World of Light and the world of matter.⁴¹ It should not come as a surprise, therefore, that Abatur is portrayed as a priest, since intermediation is the chief characteristic of the angelic vice-regent. Just as Metatron's priestly role in the heavenly tabernacle serves as a model for the earthly priesthood, so Abatur's priestly activity is a paradigm for that of his human counterparts.

It may be argued that, in contrast to Mandaeism, the earthly priesthood in Judaism no longer functioned during the period when even the earliest Metatron literature was produced. Nevertheless, there is evidence that the mystics who produced the *Heikhalot* literature identified themselves as spiritual or, in the case of R. Ishmael in particular, physical representatives of the priesthood.⁴²

³⁸ *The Scroll of Kingship*, p. 51.

³⁹ J. J. Buckley, "The Mandaean *Tabalata Masqta*," *Numen* 28 (1981) pp. 152-153.

⁴⁰ On Adam as the first priest, see E. S. Drower, *The Secret Adam*, pp. 26, 30-3. On Slsam Raba see idem, *The Conversion of the Great Slsam*.

⁴¹ *The Secret Adam*, p. 26: the crown of priesthood, which is the crown of intermediation between the worlds of light and those of matter.

⁴² See, for example, the description of R. Ishmael in BT Ber. 7 and the identification of Ishmael as a priest in 3 *Ezekiel* 1-2.

Indeed, in at least one text *The Legend of the Ten Martyrs* God declares that R. Ishmael is His priestly servant on earth as Metatron is His servant on high.

As I noted above, Kurt Rudolph has argued that Mandaean sources reflect a chronological and phenomenological shift from an earlier dualism to a later monism. One example of this shift, according to Rudolph, is that earlier sources which portray the cosmogony as the rebellious work of Abathur Ptahil and the forces of chaos give way to sources which depict the creation as the work of an angel commissioned by a representative of the Great Life.¹⁷ An equally important, and related, element in this shift is what Rudolph refers to as a process of "clericalization" and "ritualization."¹⁸ According to Rudolph, as time passed, Mandaean literature and rituals increasingly became the patrimony of an emerging priestly elite.¹⁹

An important element in the trends toward monism and the empowerment of the priesthood, was the rehabilitation of previously condemned heavenly priests, such as Yashaman and Abathur. As Rudolph writes: "Out of celestial beings come types of celestial priests, the erring and then rehabilitated priest is an especially favorite theme of this kind."²⁰ There is a definite connection between the mythological theme of "erring and then rehabilitated" celestial priests such as Abathur and the Mandaean rituals for the rehabilitation of human priests. As Drower has noted, the purpose of these scrolls is precisely "to discover what must be done to atone for errors in recitation or ritual or to find out what will restore to office a priest who has incurred pollution or committed an involuntary crime against ritual law."²¹ The rehabilitation of Abathur therefore functions as a model and even a justification for the rehabilitation of the human priesthood and vice versa.

¹⁷ See *Theogonic, Kosmogonic and Anthropogonic*, pp. 9, 11.

¹⁸ Rudolph, *Der Mandäer II: Der Kult*, pp. 137-38, 196, 213, 341-342.

¹⁹ See "Problems of a History of the Development of the Mandaean Religion," p. 231. "This priestly elite, if one may put it so, reserved for itself special documents, has its written works of its sort as its property, a development which was utterly foreign to ancient Mandaeism since there even now was a Mandaean who attached himself to the community."

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 233-234. On the rehabilitation of Yashaman, cf. *Theogonic, Kosmogonic and Anthropogonic*, p. 120; of Abathur, pp. 13-33. On the relationship between the trends towards monism and clericalization and the rehabilitation of heavenly priests, see p. 342.

²¹ *The Secret Adam*, p. 66.

The erring and rehabilitation of heavenly priests is expressed in a variety of ways. *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship* warns the initiate not to err as Yohannan and Abatur did: 'be warned and beware of the works or rites' that Yohannan performed! For he did not put on his crown Abatur divided it i.e. the ritual into three kinds it became useless. The great mystery of seed and the three mysteries of distress departed from his intelligence and they took their course which is from Abatur. He became small and unimportant and went to become 'He-of-the Scales'.¹⁶ In one hymn from *The Canonical Prayerbook*, the human being asks for forgiveness of his own sins and then declares that Yohannan, Abatur, and Ptahil will be forgiven for their transgressions as well (once again emphasizing the correlation between heavenly and human beings):

Forgive the sins, trespasses, follies, stumblings and mistakes of him who made (furnished) this bread, *manqta* and *tabuta*. His sins, trespasses, follies, stumblings and mistakes you will remit for him, my lord Mandai-d-Hua and Great First Life (those of the donor of fee and oblation). For our forefathers there shall be forgiveness of sins. For Yohannan son of Demai-Hua there shall be forgiveness of sins. For Abatur son of Barrai there shall be forgiveness of sins. For Ptahil son of Zahnel there shall be forgiveness of sins.¹⁷

In her analysis of *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship* Buckley argues for an internal debate within Mandaean literature over the rehabilitation of *perforated* priests. Early texts like *Canonical Prayerbook* 243 and the following passage from the *Ginza* emphasize that the rehabilitation of Yohannan, Abatur, and Ptahil will only occur at the final judgement:

The works of the Tibil (the earth) will fall into disorder, [on the Day of Judgement] and the whole firmament will be shaken. Then Yohannan, Abatur, and Ptahil come and see this world. Groaning seizes their heart, and they beat themselves on the breast. They behold the container of souls which has completely corrupted in the ground (?). On that great day of judgement sentence will be pronounced on Yohannan, Abatur, and Ptahil. Then Hbi Ziwa comes and lifts them from this world.¹⁸

¹⁶ *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship*, p. 53. On p. 96, Buckley notes concerning Abatur's wrongdoing in this passage, 'Precisely what Abatur has done wrong in dividing the ritual (?) into three parts remains unclear.'

¹⁷ *The Canonical Prayerbook*, p. 151. Hymns 237 and 243 of the collection (cf. Drew's comments on p. 215) also deal with the rehabilitation of Yohannan, Abatur, and despite his initial reluctance, Ptahil.

¹⁸ *Ginza*, p. 311. See also *The Canonical Prayerbook* 243, p. 200.

By contrast, *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship Duran Malkuta Lata*, a later document concerned with the human priesthood, takes a more lenient position, as Buckley writes:

I think DML [*Duran Malkuta Lata*] lingers over the hapless saviour-needy utras because it suits the text's own interest. To wit: the activity of priest-creating inevitably conjures up the somber lessons of the primordial priests/utras who went astray. When Hibil Ziwa pleads for forgiveness regarding Abatur, "place your right hands on him," he advocates lenience toward sinning priest-colleagues, a lenience that the Great Life was not ready to extend to Abatur in CP [*Canonical Prayerbook*, 243]. This is an example of Mandaean inter-textual criticism: the author of DML seems to feel that the Great Life in CP 243 was too stern a attitude that should be softened with regard to faux pas committed by earthly priests.¹⁰

In a passage from the *Mandaean Book of John*, a messenger from the Great Life informs Yohannan that he will be re-enthroned in the World of Light: "Your throne is firmly erected as it was and you will be called a king in your shkina."¹¹ There is an analogy between the rehabilitation and enthronement of Yohannan in this passage and the ascent and heavenly enthronement of the human soul in Mandaean sources.¹² As *The Canonical Prayerbook* declares: "For thee [the human soul] a throne of rest is set up in which there is no heat and wrath."¹³ This process recalls the Jewish traditions I examined above where the ascent, enthronement and angelification of Enoch-Metatron serves as a paradigm for the similar transformation of the Merkabah mystic.

Abathur and Metatron

In a number of passages, Abathur expresses his desire for rehabilitation by pleading with a representative from the World of Light to deliver a favourable report concerning him to the Great Life. This theme is eloquently depicted in a passage from the *Ginza Raba*, which also reveals a number of remarkable parallels between Abathur and Metatron:

¹⁰ *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship*, p. 90.

¹¹ *Das Johannesbuch*, p. 40. Widengren, "Heavenly Enthronement and Baptism," p. 562 analyses this passage.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Canonical Prayerbook*, p. 96. See also Rudolph's observations in *moses: The Nazarene and History of Gnosticism*, San Francisco, 1983, p. 188.

He [Manda d'Hua] goes and arrives at the watchhouse of the high Abathur. Thousand upon thousand [stand there with their eyes upon him, and ten thousand upon ten thousand stand before him for his service]. They raise his throne which is high and upon which he sits. When Abathur saw Manda d'Hua he stood up from his throne. Then spoke Manda d'Hua to Abathur: "Stay, say Abathur, Sit in your throne which is high, magnificent and fortified which the Great Life in Hgl. has granted to you." At that Abathur spoke to Manda d'Hua: "When you go make mention of me in the presence of the Life." Then Manda d'Hua spoke to Abathur: "When I ascend and speak and deliver a favorable report then two angels will come from in High. They will lift up the high curtain [*hargod*] between the end of your *alma* and the Great Life. They will inform you and speak to you and they will inform and say to the Great Life that Manda d'Hua has ascended on high and Abathur has administered *asha*."

In the Mandaean account, Abathur rises from his throne in order to show respect for Manda d-hua, whereas in the Jewish sources Metatron neglects to rise from his throne when he sees Aher. A heavenly voice delivered by two angels breaches the curtain (*hargod*) and informs Abathur that he has correctly and respectfully performed his duties. By contrast, in the Jewish sources, a heavenly voice comes from beyond the curtain (*hargod*) to condemn Aher.¹⁰ Like Metatron, Abathur is depicted as an enthroned judge surrounded by thousands and tens of thousands of angels, a striking parallel to the *atq yomin* of Daniel 7:9-10.¹¹ I am not arguing for the influence of one tradition on the other but rather for a similar combination of tropes.

The connection between Abathur and the *atq yomin* is confirmed by another text in which a hybrid being named Denanuxt, whom Lidzbarski describes as "ein Mittelding zwischen Mensch und Buch,"¹² ascends through the seven heavenly watchhouses until he reaches the highest of them, that of Abathur:

Winds, winds took away Denanuxt, storms, storms led him away, ladders, ladders carry him upwards and make him ascend on steps. They make him ascend and erected him in the Watchhouse of Abathur, the ancient, high, hidden and preserved one. I watched

¹⁰ Genza, p. 195.

¹¹ Furthermore, in §672 Metatron is punished by being taken beyond the *hargod* and whipped. "Immediately they brought out Metatron to outside the Curtain [*Pargod*] and struck him with sixty fiery lashes."

Geo Widengren, *The Ascension of the Apostle and the Heavenly Book* (Uppsala: Universitets Arsbokförl. 1950), pp. 68-69.

¹² Lidzbarski, *Genza*, Right, p. 205.

and saw thousands upon thousands who were standing and myriads upon myriads who were sitting. All of them clad in splendour and covered in light. A crown of victories was put on their heads. They were sitting on thrones of rest.

A number of other passages describe Abathur as the "ancient, high, the hidden and guarded" *abathur hatuqa rama kana uatira* or simply "Abathur the ancient."⁵ These epithets echo the title "Ancient of Days" from Dan 7, particularly since they appear in conjunction with the image of the thousands and myriads of ministering angels. Indeed, the Mandaean passage employs a number of parallels with terms from Daniel 7, including the Mandaic term for "ancient" or *atuqa* and the term for "throne" or *kana*. The depiction of Abathur surrounded by angelic beings with crowns on their heads also recalls 3 Enoch 16, where Aher sees Metatron seated upon a throne like a king surrounded by ministering angels and "all the princes of kingdoms crowned with crowns."

Abathur is installed at the entrance of the World of Light beneath a heavenly curtain or *hargod*. This liminal location, as well as the specific motif of the heavenly curtain or veil, appear in both Jewish and Gnostic depictions of the angelic vice-regent. Mandaean awareness of Jewish angelological traditions in general and of Metatron in particular is supported by the evidence of the magic bowls.⁶ Indeed, Steven Wasserstrom has written that "Metatron remained alive in Mandaean magic for perhaps over a millennium."⁷ The most powerful evidence for Mandaean knowledge of Metatron appears in a magic bowl written in Mandaic which depicts Metatron — like Abathur — as serving before the heavenly curtain (*hargod*), in the name of Metatron HLDH who serves before the Curtain [*hargod*] and who has compassion upon the town and who has compassion upon the countryside.⁸ This bowl was apparently written by a Jewish scribe for a Mandaean customer, which not only

⁵ Ibid., p. 210.

⁶ See, for example, *The Canonical Prayerbook*, pp. 7, 45, 46; Geniza, p. 96.

⁷ Joshua Greenfield, "Notes on Some Aramaic and Mandaic Magic Bowls," *Journal of the American Near Eastern Society of Columbia University* 5 (1974), pp. 149–56.

⁸ Steven Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbols Under Early Islam*, Princeton, 1995, p. 191, n. 98.

⁹ The identification bowl I refer to as Bowl D (9314.2) in W. S. McCullough, *Jewish and Mandaean Inspiration Bowls in the Royal Ontario Museum*, Toronto, 1991, pp. 26–47. Also see, Baruch Levine's analysis of the bowl in "The Language of the Magical Bowls," in an appendix to Jacob Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia VI*, Leiden, 1970, pp. 345–3, and Joshua Greenfield's remarks in his Prolegomenon to Odeberg's edition of 3 Enoch, p. XI, and Moshe Idel's comments in "The World

suggests Mandaean acceptance of at least some Jewish angelological beliefs — despite the strident anti-Jewish polemics which appear throughout Mandaean writings — but also indicates that at least some Jews knew Mandaic and therefore were more open to the possible influence of Mandaean traditions.

Indeed, Metatron is not the only angelic being shared by Mandaeans and Jews. Gabriel was also adopted by Mandaeans and played an important role as a demurgic figure in one version of the Mandaean cosmogony. In the *Dhawan Abatur* Abathur is described as follows: "And Abatur putterh on his robes, he whose name is Kaatie, he whose name is Bhaq, he whose name is Hazazban, he whose name is Nabh, his name is Tauriel."⁶⁰ In a Genizah fragment, a figure named Kaatie, is one of the angels who greets Moses during his heavenly ascent and one of the princes created by the Holy One blessed be He, even before the creation of the world, when "I [God] stretched the fire outside of myself."⁶¹

The many parallels between Abathur and Metatron are particularly striking when Mandaean writings I & III are placed side by side with passages from *3 Enoch* (II-IV).⁶²

I. Abathur, the ancient high, hidden and guarded, the one who is enthroned on high and holds in the depth. The one who penetrates and understands the worlds and the generations, who sees what they do and is appointed over the souls to weigh what they have done.*

II. Henceforth [after enthroning Metatron at the entrance of the seventh hekhal] the Holy One blessed be He revealed to me [Metatron] all mysteries of Torah and all secrets of wisdom and all depths of purity and all thoughts of the hearts of living creatures and all the secrets of the world and all the secrets of Creation are revealed to me as they are revealed before the Creator. And I watched intently to behold the secrets of the depth and the wonderful mystery. Before a person thinks in secret I see. And before a person makes a thing I see. And there is nothing on high and in the depth of the world hidden from me.*

of Angels in the Image of Man," p. 26, n. 90. In "The Language of the Magician Bowls," p. 359, Baruch Levine comes closest to unpacking the problematic term "III DH".

* *Dhawan Abatur* p. 7.

* Schäfer, *Genizah*, 21 T-S K21.95.A, p. 179.

* These parallel passages are cited by Odeberg in his edition of *3 Enoch*, p. 66. Odeberg devoted an entire volume to the topic of Mandaeism, *Die mandäische Religionsanschauung*, Uppsala, 1930.

* *ibid.*, p. 78, and parallel in *The Canonical Prayerbook*, p. 8. He seeth and discerneth that which the worlds and the generations do.

* *Ibid.*, citing from *3 Enoch* 11.

III. I extol, honour and glorify Abathur the ancient, high, secret and guarded one at the door of the Chamber of Life a Throne is founded for him *al baba d bay hus karna ramiah* and he is seated on it, the balance is erected before him, he weighs words and rewards, he sees and knows the words and the actions, what they are doing."

IV. I set up his [Metatron's] throne at the door of my Hall that he may sit and judge the ~~unhappy~~ household. And I placed every prince before him, to receive authority from him."

Abathur and Metatron are both enthroned at the apex of the physical world, a location which is also at the entrance of the divine abode. From this liminal position they possess complete vision and knowledge of the lower world's events and inhabitants, and, at the same time, they can receive instructions from on high. Both figures guard the gates of God's dwelling and decide who will be allowed to enter. In this respect they function like a *psychopompos* or "leader of souls" into the divine realm, as the following passages reveal:

I. And Abathur when he seeth thee will take thy hand in holy truth *kashta*. Will clothe thee in his radiance and cover thee with his light. And he will set thee in his scales. Thou wilt be clothed in thy radiant-body and mighty wrappings of light. He will set wreaths of victories on thy head; Thou wilt become akin to 'uthras, An instant of the world of light. Thou wilt rise up to the place which is the House of Perfection."

II. At once the Holy One, blessed be He, summoned to my aid his servant the angel Metatron Prince of the Divine Presence. He drew out to meet me with great alacrity, to save me from their [the other angels'] power. He grasped me with his hand before their eyes and said to me, "Come in peace into the presence of the high and exalted King to behold the likeness of the chariot." Then I entered the seventh palace."

Abathur and Metatron greet the ascending human being or soul, take the individual's hand and lead him to the divine dwelling.

¹ Oenbergh, *3 Enoch*, pp. 65-66, citing from Liezbarski, *Mandäische Literatur: Text und Übersetzung*, Berlin, 924, pp. 10-11. The same passage is found in Drorow's *The Canonical Prayerbook*, pp. 73. "I worship, adore and praise the Ancient, Supernal One and Guarded Abathur whose strength is hidden and guarded whose throne is placed at the gate of the House of Life. He sitteth with his scales set before him."

² *Ibid.*, citing from *3 Enoch* 48c.

³ *The Canonical Prayerbook*, p. 302.

⁴ *3 Enoch* 1, as cited in Alexander, "3 (the Hebrew Apocalypse of) Enoch," p. 256.

place the House of Perfection and the seventh hekhal, respectively. This function of the angelic vice regent is inherited from Jewish apocalyptic traditions of the chief angel (frequently Michael, who leads the human visionary through a tour of heaven). The transformation which the human soul undergoes in the Mandaeen passage resembles the transformation which Enoch undergoes in *2 Enoch* 12, where he is wrapped in a "glorious cloak in which brightness, brilliance, splendor, and luster of every kind were fixed," and crowned with a "king's crown." Indeed both elements, the glorious garments and crown, probably reflect the influence of Jewish apocalyptic sources, such as *The Ascension of Isaiah*, on Hekhalot and Mandaeen literature, alike.

Abatur is also depicted as wearing garments of light, cf., for example, *A Pan of Satoran Commemoration* p. 35 and *The Epiphany Proclamation* 45. "Take thou the robe put on garment in garment and robe over robe like the vestments of Abatur." Other Mandaean divine figures are also described as wearing garments of light (see Hultberg, *2 Enoch* p. 66). The closest parallel to Enoch's transformation is that of the Mandaean visionary, Satoran, who is taken by the hands of the higher Abatur (cf. *Canon* 189). When I Satoran was raised and came into being, I came into being from the source of the light of radiance. When my father considered and called me forth, he called me forth from the source of radiance. He clothed me in a garment of radiance and wrapped me in a covering of light. He gave me a great crown of whose radiance he wears none. It is more likely that Mandaeen, as well as Hekhalot, depictions of the garments which I wear are indebted in some degree to Jewish apocalyptic rather than to other sources, as over Widengren has argued in *The Gnostic Gospels* (p. 103). On the issue of the garment in Jewish, Mandaean, and Iranian sources, see also R. J. Z. Werblowsky's discussion of its review in Doreen's *The Mandaean Journal of Jewish Studies* 8, 1963, p. 132. On the issue of the garments in Mandaean sources specifically, see E. Segallberg, *Mandaean Studies in the History of Mandaean Baptism* (p. 100, n. 1). H. K. v. n. t. e. d. Segallberg's assertion in her article "Why Once is Not Enough: Mandaean Baptism: Mandaean as an Example of a Rebirth" (R. J. Z. p. 29) for a discussion of the glorious garments and crown in *The Ascension of Isaiah* and in Jewish apocalyptic texts in general, see I. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* (pp. 101-102) with notes on the relation of the glorious garments and crown to Jewish literature. Raphael Luce, *The Divine Light and the Saint: Jonathan, Harvard Theological Review* 58, 1966, 101-102; *Jewish Mysticism* (p. 101) Wayne Meeks, "The Image of the Ascending Saint: A Study in the Symbolism of the Ascending Saint," *History of Religions* 3, 1964, p. 81 notes that from a phenomenological perspective the change of garments of light, etc., or passage of light, etc., may be a symbol of the death and rebirth of the saint, but also an assumption of the power of the deity represented by the new garb. This is certainly the case in the Jewish and Mandaean passages we have mentioned. On p. 187, Meeks discusses the connection between the glorious garments and the baptismal context, and the image of God which is conferred as a robe of light. Furthermore, it is clear that Jewish and Samaritan sources, including depictions of the revelation of God to human beings, Moses in particular, were clothed with the image of God which Adam lost in the Garden of Eden. A version of this tradition is also present in

Both Metatron and Abathur are associated with the care of human souls in other ways. Metatron is characterized as the teacher of "all the souls of the dead that have died in their mothers' wombs, and of the babies that have died at their mothers' breasts, and of the schoolchildren that have died while studying the five books of the Torah."² Abathur's watchhouse is depicted as the storage place for the pre-existent souls that have not yet descended to earth.³ Once again we observe the logic of the angelic vice regent: he is a guardian of the gate, a lord of mediation. Therefore Metatron and Abathur are in charge of souls that are betwixt and between different modes of existence. In one case, the souls belong to those individuals who were never born or who died too young to receive a proper education; in the other case the souls are waiting for their corresponding bodies to be born.

Hypostatic Traditions

A final parallel between Abathur and Metatron is that both figures function as hypostatic manifestations of the Divine Anthropos.⁴ As we will see shortly, most of the relevant passages link Abathur with specific body parts, as Metatron is linked with the face in early Jewish sources and with the phallus in medieval kabbalistic sources. One Mandaean passage does link the body 'stuna with the image of the scales, a symbol of Abathur. For the body is like a pair of balances!"⁵ At least one Mandaean text identifies Abathur with the hypostatic body itself, just as Metatron was linked with the *Shur Qomah*. The passage appears in *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship*. Its interpretation of the letters of the alphabet recalls similar descriptions in *The Thousand and Twelve Questions*, another priestly

Mandaean sources, as Meeks notes: "Robing with 'garments of light' restores the heavenly self in the Mandaean masbuta and masqia rituals." In other words, the wearing of the glorious garments signifies the restoration to the original, divine self.

² *Enoch* 48C.

³ See Gutz, pp. 207-210.

⁴ Another formulation of the hypostatic traditions associated with Abathur and their connections to the Kabbalah appears in *The Gnostic Imagination*, pp. 124-127. For other Mandaean passages which depict the hypostatic phallus which I did not discuss in *The Gnostic Imagination*, see J. J. Buckley, *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship*, pp. 21, 36.

⁵ E. S. Drower, *A Part of Nestorian Commentaries*, "The Great 'First World,'" p. 50.

Mandaean text. In this passage, the Wellspring, a female being, generates other beings who are each identified with a letter of the Mandaean alphabet. The sequence proceeds from "A" to "T," and comprises the first eight letters of the Mandaean alphabet; there is no distinction phonemically between an original "het" and a "heh," so the text does not include a "het" in the eighth position.⁶ Following this, the text cites another tradition in which the spirit, body, and soul are each linked with a different letter. Although in the first tradition, Abathar is identified with the letter "U" a "waw" in the second, he is identified with the "ayn" which, as the text declares, "belongs to the body, it is Abatur:

Yusamin the Pure, Yawar the Great, Abatur the Lofty, Sam Mana Smira, and Sam Zawa proceeded from her [the Wellspring]. They are the brothers of the Lord of Greatness and they are the letters of the alphabet. A is the Lord of Greatness, B is Mana the Great Mighty one, G is the Great Father of Glory, D is Yusamin the Pure, H is Yawar the Great, U is Abatur the Lofty, Z is Sam Mana Smira, T is Singlan the Great.... In another scroll I shall teach you about those three kings who set themselves, who are H, 'AYN, and D. Those are three kings who stand in one garment, i.e. are sanctified with one another. They are spirit, body, and soul. Behold! If spirit built the body, she is the mistress of mankind, for H is the spirit. And 'AYN belongs to the body, it is Abatur.... Anyone who reveals a portion of these mysteries, the well Sumqac shall be his dwelling and he shall not see his creator! And life is victorious!

This esoteric tradition is extremely important for a number of reasons. First it is the only Mandaean text I know of which explicitly links Abathar with the body itself rather than a particular organ. Second, this passage recalls the letter speculation of a number of Jewish mystical texts including the *Sefer Yetzira* and *Sefer Ha-Bahir*. Several scholars, including Drower and Dan Cohn-Sherbok, have already noted parallels between certain Mandaean doctrines and the *Sefer Yetzira*.⁷ None of them have comparatively examined the Mandaean and Jewish texts in depth, however. Unfortunately, such a detailed comparison also lies beyond the scope of the present study, since it would involve a prolonged detour into the complicated

⁶ On Mandaic orthography and this point in particular, see Edwin Yamauchi, *Mandaic Incantation Texts*, New Haven, 1967, p. 70.

⁷ *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship*, p. 59.

⁸ See *The Secret Adam*, p. 11; Dan Cohn-Sherbok, "The Apocalypse in Mandaean and Jewish Gnosticism", *idem*, "The Gnostic Mandaean and Heterodox Judaism" in *Rabbinic Perspectives on the New Testament*. Also see Zvi Werblowsky's comments in his review of Drower's *The Secret Adam*, in *Journal of Semitic Studies*.

realm of the Kabbalah, for as Zwi Werblowsky noted in a review of Drower's *The Secret Adam*: "What is so remarkable about these similarities [between Mandaeism and Jewish mysticism] is the fact that they relate to medieval Kabbalah even more than to the earlier, 'gnostic' Hekhaloth-mysticism."¹

There is a great need for a systematic comparison of Mandaean and kabbalistic literature. Given the present study's concentration on earlier Jewish sources, I will limit myself to a few observations concerning the relationship of the *The Secret of Exalted Kingship* to what is generally considered to be the first kabbalistic text, the *Bahir*, a Provençal work from the 12th century. Throughout his writings, Scholem depicted the *Sefer ha-Bahir* as a conduit for Gnostic influences in the Kabbalah.² Although Scholem consistently cited the *Bahir* as evidence for the historical impact of ancient Gnosticism on the Kabbalah, he also considered the possibility that the parallels between the *Bahir* and Gnostic sources were fundamentally phenomenological rather than historical:

The fundamental problem in the study of the book [i.e. the *Bahir*] is the affinity based on an as yet unknown historical link between the gnosticism of the *mandaeic* and *mandean* era and the sources from which the material in *Sefer ha-Bahir* is derived? Or should it possibly be seen as a purely psychological phenomenon, i.e. as a spontaneous upsurge from the depths of the soul's imagination without any historical continuity?

In *Origins of the Kabbalah*, Scholem seemed to waver between historical and phenomenological explanations for the parallels between Gnosticism and the Kabbalah. On the one hand, Scholem wrote "it is not too much to assume that the gnostic material of Oriental origin in the Book *Bahir*, once it was received and adopted by a circle of religiously agitated and productive men, amply suffices to explain the inner development of the Kabbalah up to and including the *Zohar*."³ On the other hand, Scholem suggested that "The process within the pleroma that brought forth the aeons or the sefirot could have been developed anew, using purely Jewish forms

¹ Werblowsky, *op. cit.*, 132.

² See, for example, *Major Trends*, 34, 75; "Kabbalah," *Enc. Jud.*, 506, 519. Kabbalah Jerusalem 19, 33. *Origins of the Kabbalah*, 38, 68, 90, 94, 197. *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, New York 136, 9, 94.

³ *Kabbalah*, 115.

⁴ *Origins of the Kabbalah*, 90.

and based on purely Jewish material, as soon as the preliminary historical and psychological conditions were present."¹⁹

Scholem's interest in the possible links between the *Bahir* and Gnosticism focused on Western Gnostic traditions, such as the school of Valentinus. In the next few paragraphs, I will focus on parallels between the *Bahir* and Mandaeism. Like Scholem, I am open to the possibility that the similarities between Mandaean sources and the Kabbalah are the result of historical contact or conversely that they reflect parallel, independent developments. If the esoteric traditions are linked historically, the contact must have occurred in Babylonia where Jews and Mandaeans appear to have shared angelological and magical traditions. At some point, a Jewish doctrine which emerged from this syncretistic milieu may have made its way via Jewish travellers to Western Europe—a scenario akin to the one depicted in the *Chronicle of Ahimaz*, a medieval document which describes a figure named Aaron of Baghdad (Abu Aaron) as travelling from Babylonia to southern Italy, eventually transmitting his secrets to Moses b. Kalonymus, a founder of the German Pietists (*Haside Ashkenaz*). Whether or not such a historical link existed between Mandaean and Jewish traditions, and it seems extremely unlikely that it could ever be proved, the parallels between the sources are thought provoking.

Both the *Bahir* and *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship* depict emanatory systems in which the primordial source of creation is a tree and a wellspring. As the Mandaean text declares: "those twenty-four letters of the alphabet are the twenty-four crowns that clothe the twenty-four kings who are formed by the light. For the light, the Wellspring, and the Datepalm wear the radiance that glows in the light of *Tibit* ["earth"] and the twenty-four stars, the body, and the twenty-four mysteries that do not sleep."²⁰ According to another Mandaean text from the *huros gamos* between the phallic datepalm and vaginal wellspring *Ana u-sindirka* proceed all words and generations.²¹ The *Dhwan Abatur* contains a drawing of a tree known as *'ana d-mrabia yanna* "the tree which nourishes nurslings" which, as Drower notes, "is said to be identical with the *Sindarka*" mentioned above.²²

¹⁹ Ibid. 99.

²⁰ *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship*, p. 41.

²¹ *The Thousand and Twelve Questions*, p. 110. See Drower's discussion in *The Secret Adam*, pp. 11.

²² See *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran*, pp. 230-231.

The *Bahir* describes a similar cosmogonic process: "I [God] am the one who planted this tree [etan] in order to delight in it, I and all the world. And in it I established All and I called it Ad. For all depends on it, and all proceed from it, and all need it, and all gaze on it, and all wait for it, and from it fly all the souls. To what is this similar? To a king who wanted to plant a tree in his garden. He dug and opened a spring [ma'ayan], flowing with living waters [mayim hayim]. He then planted the tree and it stood, giving forth fruit. It was successfully rooted, since it was always watered from the spring."³⁹ This passage has much in common with the Mandaean symbology of tree and wellspring, including the reference to the "living waters" *mayim hayim*, a concept which appears throughout Mandaean sources where the waters are called by the anagogous expression *mas hna*.

The *Bahir* has a complex cosmological and mythological system of light, flowing water, letters of the alphabet, crowns, parts of the body, sexual symbols, and divine attributes. These same elements appear in *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship* where they interact in ways recalling their relationship in the *Bahir*. Fully illuminating these parallels would require a detailed semiotic analysis, a worthwhile project, but one taking us too far afield from our original subject. To give some indication of the similarity between Mandaean and kabbalistic thought, however, I quote another passage from *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship*:

As to the novice[priest] you know that there is something female about him — the inner crown that comes to the outer one supports it. Behold, the crown of the bridegroom has something internal to it, something dwelling in the mystery of the female. If there is nothing external within it its kingship is lost. Behold the female without the male cannot be established.⁴⁰

Typically the crown or *taga* is a male priestly symbol in Mandaeism and yet this passage emphasizes its androgynous character, an androgyny in which the female supports and is literally comprised within the male. This model of androgyny and its use of crown and marital symbolism greatly resembles one of the most important symbolic structures of the Kabbalah, one which Eliot Wolfson has explicated as follows: "The image of the masculine king wearing the crown connotes perfect unity of male and female, which as I have

³⁹ *Seder ha-Bahir*, sect. 15-16.

⁴⁰ *The Thousand and Twelve Questions*, p. 41.

noted above involves a reconstitution of the male androgyne — the image of the crown or the process of crowning is used to denote the union of the masculine and feminine aspects of the *pleroma*.⁵⁸ Within the *Bahir*, the idea of androgyny is linked to the date palm which is described as "including both male and female. How is this? The *lulav* [the frond of the date palm] is male and the fruit is male on the outside and female on the inside."⁵⁹ Thus, the *Bahir*, like the Mandaeen text, links the masculine with the external and the feminine with the internal.

I close my discussion of *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship* and its parallels with kabbalistic sources by returning to the passage which prompted this excursus. The section on the herays of light and their connection to the letters of the alphabet is introduced by the following line: "These are the seven kings who proceeded from one Wellspring [*ayin*] and five others who proceeded from other Wellsprings. A is the Lord of Greatness, B is Mana the Great."⁶⁰ This passage has a close parallel in the *Bahir*: "These are the explicit holy exalted names. There are twelve names, one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel. To what is this similar? A king had a beautiful wellspring [*maayan*]. All his brothers had no water except from this wellspring and could not endure thirst. What did he do to this wellspring? He made twelve pipes for the fountain and gave them twelve names."⁶¹ This parable is followed by a discussion of the letters of the alphabet. Both sources speak of twelve divine figures fed by primordial wellsprings, both link this theogonic model with the alphabet. Whether or not the kabbalistic and Mandaeen authors drank from the same well of traditions, these parallels suggest the development of similar symbolic and mythological systems and shed new light on the possible relationship of the *Bahir* to Gnostic sources.

Despite their similarities, the *Bahir* and Mandaeen sources also reflect the profound differences between Judaism and Mandaeism. The *Bahir* makes liberal use of biblical citations and emphasizes the importance of the commandments (*mitzot*). Unlike Mandaeism, which valorizes the North as "the source of light, instruction, and healing," the North Star, for example, is the seat of Abathur,⁶² the

⁵⁸ Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, pp. 363-364.

⁵⁹ *Seder ha-Bahir*, sec. 59.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, sec. 47.

⁶¹ On the significance of the North in Mandaeism, see *The Mandaeen of Iraq and Iran*, p. 18, n. 9; p. 199 on Abathur and the north star.

Bahr drawing on an older Jewish tradition, considers the North to be the source of evil. The *Bahr* also valorizes circumcision, while Mandaeans abhor the practice and a circumcized man cannot serve as a priest.

Although they have greatly differing attitudes towards circumcision, both Mandaeism and the Kabbalah view the phallus as a locus of esoteric knowledge or gnosis. The following passage from the Mandaean work known as *The Lesser First World* indicates this clearly. It describes the phallus as "more venerated than all the mysteries" and identifies Abathur as the hypostatic phallus of the Cosmic Body.

And when thou recitest 'Life dwelleth in Its own radiance', thou offerest praise to Maleness—the male organ—the name of which is Abathur of the scales but which the worlds and generations call *duna* [Lat. 'egg' Eng. 'penis'], for it is more venerated than all the mysteries, and worlds and generations are held comprised therein.²⁹

The same text identifies Abathur as the hypostatic tongue, as well "the lofty Abathur whose name is 'the Tongue' *tishana*."³⁰ A parallel depiction is found in *The Thousand and Twelve Questions*: 'Abathur-Rama, whose name is the Great Jordan of White Water' that he is called 'the Tongue'.³¹ Elsewhere the Jordan is explicitly identified as semen: "she [the sea] received a sign from the Jordan—which is Semen—and entered the Seas."³² Thus, Abathur is identified as the semen as well as the phallus, itself.

At first the identification of Abathur as the hypostatic tongue may seem both obscure and unrelated to his function as the divine phallus. The reason for this identification is illuminated, however, when we observe that in the Jewish mystical and cosmological text, *Sefer Yesira*, the "circumcision of the tongue and the mouth" is identified with the "circumcision of the foreskin."³³ Moreover as Yehuda Liebes has observed, the *Zohar* considers the *sefirah* called Da'at to be a symbol of the tongue, which is considered

²⁹ *A Pair of Nasorean Commentaries*, p. 37. See Drower's comment in *The Secret Adam*, p. 29: "In this passage the great of virility is assigned to Abathur of the Scales." Also cf. Ruzbihan, *Diogenes, Hermesgona and Anthrogonia*, p. 130 n. 1.

³⁰ *A Pair of Nasorean Commentaries*, p. 38. Drower has written, *The Secret Adam*, p. 29 that "semen is attributed to Hibil-Ziwa because thou, Hibil-Ziwa, art the Living Seed. Thou rulest us and all worlds."

³¹ *The Thousand and Twelve Questions*, p. 174.

³² *A Pair of Nasorean Commentaries*, p. 34.

³³ *Sefer Yesira* 13. See I. Gruenwald, "A Preliminary Critical Edition of *Sefer Yesira*," *Israel Oriental Studies* 1, 1971, p. 141. Both Elliot Wolfson, "Circumcision

analogous to the male organ".⁸ Thus, as in the medieval Jewish sources, the Mandaean depictions of Abathur preserve the phenomenological link between the tongue and the phallus.

The identification of Abathur as both the hypostatic phallus and tongue reflects two aspects of his character. Abathur is the father of the demurge, Ptahil and may have been understood to be the "father of the uthras" *aba d-uthra*.⁹ The characterization of Abathur as the father of a host of angelic beings would have easily translated into, or reinforced, an identification of Abathur as the phallus, i.e. the organ of fatherhood and as semen. Both Brandt and Noldeke saw this title as a possible etymology for the name Abathur. Macuch has pointed out that despite the similarity between phrases such as *aba d-uthra hatqa rama kasia nura* "the ancient, lofty, concealed, guarded father of the uthras" and *abatur hatqa rama kasia nura* "Abathur the ancient, lofty, concealed and guarded", the title "father of the uthras" does not appear to have been applied to Abathur in Mandaean literature although it is linked with the figure B'haq-Zwa as we saw above who is identified with Abathur.¹⁰

Just as importantly, Abathur was identified with the balance or scale in his avatar as Abathur d muzania or 'Abathur of the Scales'. Eliot Watson has demonstrated that Jewish mystics established linguistic and iconographic connections between the scale and the phallus.¹¹ For example, the medieval work *Sefer ha-Yyyun* makes a pun on the Hebrew word *peles* or *scale* whose consonants can also signify the Latin word *phallus*.¹² Watson observes that in a

Version and Textual Interpretation From Midrashic Trope to Mystical Symbol" *History of Religions* 2 (1987) p. 20; and Yehonah Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar* (Albany 1993), p. 171, n. 65, note this connection. It should be mentioned that the Mandaeans do not practice circumcision nor do they speak of the penis as, for example, in the Gospel of Thomas 82:1-3. Y. Yamauchi, *Mystic Ethics and Mandaean Origins*, p. 64; E. S. Drower, *Hidden Gospels*, p. 7.

⁸ *Studies in the Zohar*, p. 171, n. 65, where Liebes refers to Da'at as "the inner essence of Yesod. Both Da'at and Yesod are on the 'middle line' ... and both have to do with the matter of coupling." In "Erasing the Erasure: Gender and the Writing of God's Book in Kabbalah," *Symbolism*, in *Essays in the Square: Studies in the Use of Gender in Kabbalah*, *Symbolism* (Albany 1993), p. 64. Eliot Watson writes, "just as the scale and the line are phallic symbols so too is the scale, or more specifically, the tongue of the scale."

⁹ Cf. Mark Lachbarkski, *Omega*, pp. 97ff.

¹⁰ Rudolf Macuch, *Handbook of Mandaean and Modern Mandaean*, 210-211.

¹¹ "Erasing the Erasure," p. 63. Y. Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, pp. 68-70, also discusses these motifs. For the image of the scale or balance in the Zohar, in general see Y. Liebes, *Versions of the Zohar* (Leiden, 1976), pp. 327-35. Hebrew.

¹² "Erasing the Erasure," p. 63. Heb. *peles* and Lat. *phallus* are written with the same consonants in Hebrew.

variety of kabbalistic sources, the scale is graphically represented as follows "the weights of the scale are thought to correspond to the testicles and the tongue in the middle to the *membrum virue*."¹⁰³ A similar symbolic matrix underlies the connections between Abathur the phallus and the tongue in Mandaean literature.

Finally according to yet another passage Abathur is the *iver* Abatur-Rama: he is the *iver* [*abatur rama kabda hu*].¹⁰⁴ Underlying the identification between Abathur and the *iver* may be a pun on the Mandaic word *kabda*, which generally means *iver* but in this case may also have the connotation of *Glory*, as in Hebrew.¹⁰⁵ Similar puns are quite common in Mandaean literature, as J. J. Buckley points out "Mandaean texts abound in obviously enjoyed puns and word-plays."¹⁰⁶ A link between the *Glory* and the divine phallus also appears in the *Zohar* as Liebes writes: "In the *Zohar* both the male organ and the *sefir*a of *Yesod* are called the glory of the body, *huldura de-gufa* II, 186b)."

Abathur of the Scales

As the lord or embodiment of the scales, Abathur mediates between opposing elements. It is not surprising that Abathur's realm is described as follows: "There is death, there is life. There is darkness, there is light. There is error, there is truth. There is destruction, there is construction. There is blow, there is healing."¹⁰⁷ Until now, scholars have emphasized the Iranian background of Abathur's function as weigher of souls, by linking Abathur with the Iranian figure of Rashnu *razishta*.¹⁰⁸ As Kurt Rudolph writes: "Das an den Seelenaufstieg anschliessende Seelengericht durch den Waagemann Abathur hat sein Vorbild in dem Rashnu *razishta*."¹⁰⁹ Although

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 64, and p. 182, n. 128 for kabbalistic sources of this image.

¹⁰⁴ *A Pair of Nasorean Commentaries*, p. 8.

¹⁰⁵ Drower has suggested this very pun in a different context, see, *A Pair of Nasorean Commentaries*, p. 57, n. 3.

¹⁰⁶ Buckley, *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship*, p. 82.

¹⁰⁷ *Studies in the Zohar*, p. 27.

¹⁰⁸ *Chin.* 20b. This is the list communicated by Disai to Denahusi. On 207 these elements are identified with Ruha.

¹⁰⁹ See, for example, the extreme position taken by Krading: "The Mandaic God Ptahil," p. 163, "Abatur, literally 'the man with the scales' (p.-bowing Andreas) and none other than the Iranian Rashnu."

¹¹⁰ K. Rudolph, *Die Mandäer*, Vol. I, p. 124. See also the similar view of Brandt: *Schicksal der Seele nach dem Tode*, pp. 27-28.

Abathur is explicitly identified with 'Rashna uRast' in the *Ganza Raba*, this occurs in a passage of late provenance:

While acknowledging the possibility of Iranian or Egyptian influence on Abathur's function as a weigher of souls, it also behooves us to examine Jewish literature for possible connections. The motif of weighing an individual or his deeds in a scale 'psy-chostasy' appears frequently in biblical and rabbinic sources.¹ In apocalyptic literature, the theme of weighing merits emerges in a number of texts, where it is sometimes associated with a secondary divine being instead of with God, as in the biblical and rabbinic sources.²

The specific motif of an angelic being who weighs souls, rather than deeds or merits, appears in the *Testament of Abraham* (Reveries on A. ch. 12, a text we examined above). In this text, the biblical figure Abel is depicted as the enthroned judge, while another "sunlike angel" Dokaël actually weighs the souls in a balance.

Ganza, p. 284

The Bible contains several examples of weighing the individual in the scale, including Job 31: 6-7, Prov. 16: 1, Ps. 62: 12, and Ecclesiastes 3: 1. Job 31: 6-7 reads: "Let Him weigh me on the scale of justice; let Him weigh me on the balance of justice. If I have weighed on a scale together they are less than breath." Prov. 62: 12: "Humanity are vanity; people are vanity; weighed on a scale together they are less than breath." Daniel 5: 27: "You have been weighed in the balance and found wanting." Ecclesiastes 3: 1: "For the scales of justice are weighing the merits of an individual, although the image of weighing the individual is also present. Two of the most famous rabbinic examples of his merit are *Pirke de-R. Eliezer* 8, where Abba Saul declares: "all the sages of Israel were in the scale of a balance, and even Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus was with them, and Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria, the other scale, he would outweigh them all." and *Pesqta de Rav Ashana* 200v (ed. Buber 167a), where R. Eliezer declares: "The scales are evenly balanced. The scales of iniquities on the one side and of merits on the other; the Holy One balances the beam of the scale of merit." For a discussion of the theme of weighing merits in a balance in rabbinic literature, cf. E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, London and Philadelphia, 1977, pp. 128-147.

In apocalyptic writings, the motif of a cosmic being who weighs merits with a scale appears in several places, including *1 Enoch* 3: 34 and *1 Enoch* 4: 1-18. In *1 Enoch* 3: 34 we read: "Now therefore weigh thou our iniquities, and those of the imbecile, and the world, in the balance [*pandua in statera mensas iniquitates*], and so that be found which was the first of the scales in times [*momentum primum ade de tunc*]." In *1 Enoch* 4: 1-18, Enoch sees the four Archangels; he saw all the secrets of the heavens, and how the largeness is divided, and how the account of men are weighed in the balance. And in *1 Enoch* 4: 18, the Lord of Spirits placed the Elect One on the throne of glory. And he shall judge all the work. The holy above in the heaven, and in the balance shall their deeds be weighed. The importance of the last passage is that the function of weighing merits has been transferred from God to a lower divine being, placed by God on a throne of glory and appointed weigher and judge.

And between the two gates there stood a terrifying throne with the appearance of terrifying crystal, flashing like fire. And upon it sat a wondrous man, bright as the sun like unto a son of God. Before him stood a table like crystal, all of gold and byssus. In front of the table sat a high-bearing angel holding a balance in his hand.... And the one who was in the front of the table, who was holding the balance, weighed the souls.¹

The parallels between this passage and Mandaean depictions of Abathur are significant and, furthermore, are not limited to the motifs of the angelic beings who judge and weigh human souls, rather than deeds or merits. Another important parallel is the presence of a crystal structure at the heavenly location of the weighing. In the passage cited above, both a throne and a table of crystal are associated with the weighing and judging of souls. The Mandaean text *Dwan Abatur* also juxtaposes the motifs of a crystal structure and the psychostasy:

This is Abatur who is in charge of the weighing and numbering [of souls]. This is the throne Sar 'the stone-firm'. This is the vault, its name is "Covering over," its name is "Pure Crystal" [*bitura dakin*]. It is a crystal cut into facets [*qura*]. It abideth and my soul counteth thereon.²

Although the Mandaeen passage depicts the heavenly vault, rather than a throne or table, as composed of crystal, the image of a heavenly crystal structure is almost certainly derived from the same Jewish apocalyptic milieu. Indeed, another Mandaeen text actually depicts the construction of a sanctuary of crystal and a table or tray of crystal by primordial priests: "Thereupon they set to work and built a sanctuary [*imanda*] all of pure crystal... and set up a table [*tanana*] that was of pure crystal."³

In many apocalyptic texts, the earthly or heavenly Temple in Jerusalem is described as composed of crystal or "pure marble":⁴

¹ *Test. of Abr.* 12, as cited in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, p. 889; see also the comments at n. 1.

Dwan Abatur, p. 7.

² "A Pair of Nasorean Commentaries," pp. 10-11. Drower discusses this passage in *The Secret Adam*, pp. 70ff. For *tanana* as "table," also see *A Pair of Nasorean Commentaries*, p. 49.

³ Rev. 21:11 portrays the new Jerusalem which descends from heaven as having the glory of God; and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal." BT Sukk. 51a and R. H. Baer, *Le voyage mystique des quatre*. André Neher, "Le voyage mystique des quatre," *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, CNL, 1951.

The earliest witness for this motif is *1 Enoch* 14, where Enoch ascends to heaven and experiences the following

And I came into the tongues of the fire and drew near to a great house which was built of white marble, and the inner walls were like mosaics of white marble, the floor of crystal.... And behold there was an opening before me and a second house which is greater than the former. And I observed and saw inside it a lofty throne its appearance was like crystal. And the Great Glory was sitting upon it....¹⁰

In this early passage, we find traces of the later Mandaeen motif of a heavenly crystal vault in this case the "floor" of the heavenly house and the later apocalyptic motif of the throne of crystal (as in *Test of Abr* associated with the image of an enthroned judge). Ultimately, the image of a heavenly structure composed of crystal probably derives from biblical verses like Ex 24.10, where "under His [God's] feet there was the likeness of a pavement of sapphire like the very sky for purity" and Ezek 1.22 "Above the heads of the creatures was a form an expanse with an awe-inspiring gleam as of crystal, was spread out above their heads."¹¹

By illuminating the many parallels between Mandaeen and Jewish depictions of an enthroned being who weighs and/or judges human souls, I am not arguing that the older Jewish sources necessarily influenced the development of the later Mandaeen tradition. I am suggesting, however, that the previous emphasis on an Iranian *Forûd* for the figure of Abathur must be re-evaluated in light of the well attested and earlier Jewish traditions discussed above. Before leaving the issue of the angelic weigher of souls or merits, it is important to note that this motif also appears in *3 Enoch* 18

Johann Maier, "Das Gefährdungsmotiv bei der Himmelsreise in der jüdischen Apokalypsen- und Gnomas-Literatur," *Kern* 5 (1963) 100-101. See also the parallel between the appearance of the earthly and heavenly Temples. Both are linked to the tradition of the celestial Temple composed of pure marble, with R. Akiva's warning in BT Hag. 12b and Hekhalot parallels §§259-345, 100-4, 67. When you arrive at the stones of pure marble do not say Water Water. On this, see also cf. David Halperin, *Faces of the Chasid*, pp. 210ff. I Greenwald discusses the motif of heavenly structures composed of crystal or sapphire in *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, p. 5, n. 2. Finally, mention should be made of the Temple of the Great One by King Tirios, which was composed of crystal pavement (cf. Henri Corbin, *Temple and Contemplation*, London, 1986, p. 360).

¹⁰ As cited in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. 1, pp. 20-21.

¹¹ Also see Ezek 1.26, "Above the expanse over their heads was the semblance of a throne in appearance like sapphire. Although the color of sapphire is blue, in a text noted by Greenwald, see p. 1 + above, the sapphire of Ex 24.10 is described as white. *Leviticus*, ad Exodus 24.10.

where among the angelic inhabitants of the seventh hekhal whom Metatron describes to R. Ishmael, we find a Shoqed Hozu:

And why is his name Shoqed Hozu? Because he weighs men's merits in the scales of a balance before the Holy One blessed be He.¹⁹

In this passage Metatron and Shoqed Hozu are separate figures, yet in one of the Hekhalot fragments found in the Genizah, Metatron is explicitly identified by the name Shoqed Hozu: Metatron the Prince of Countenance by the name of Shoqed Hozu, who is called by seven names.²⁰

Abathur and the Heavenly Waters

According to Mandaeen cosmology, the World of Light is separated from the physical cosmos by a body of water called *hafiqia mia* or "water brooks" (*Gier Wasserbach*).²¹ Abathur's throne is located at "the gate of the House of Life" immediately below these waters.²²

And the world of Abathur is below the world of the outflowing waters (*hafiqia mia*) and the world of outflowing waters below the world of the pure Yusharan (*ustma d' abatur mn astua abna d' hafiqia mia ustma d' hafiqia mia mn astua abna d' yusharan dakis*).²³

Beneath *hafiqia mia* lie seven or eight "waterhouses" or *mallaria*, which function as dwelling places for a variety of demons and purgatories for the ascending soul.²⁴ Once the soul has ascended through the *mallaria* to the 'gate of the House of Life,' Abathur tests the soul to determine whether it is worthy to enter the pleromatic realm. If the soul is worthy, then it is helped over the waters into

¹⁹ Odeberg, 3 Enoch, p. 61, writes, "The explanation given in the present verse rather presupposes a form 'Shoqed Zaki' ('weighing merits') or similar (cf. Mandaean *Abathur* Introduct. sect. 5 f.)."

²⁰ Cf. also Peter Schäfer, *Geniza-Fragmente in Hekhalot Literature*, p. 165. The text also reads: "as is Metatron Shoqed Hozu." In general, Metatron is described as possessing seventy names rather than seven. Abathur, however, has seven secret names. In *Ma'andeh Merkabah* ed. Schiörm, *Jewish Mysticism*, p. 108, we find "shoqedhozu malakh ha-paran."

²¹ E. S. Drower, *The Canonical Prayerbook*, p. 45, n. 6, writes, "*Hafiqia* now, the name of the river of departure of death which is the frontier of the worlds of light. In the *Dictionnaire* Abatur a ship ferries souls across this river."

²² E. S. Drower, *The Canonical Prayerbook*, p. 7.

²³ E. S. Drower, *The Thousand and Twelve Questions*, p. 63; Mandae p. 45.

²⁴ In *Theophrastus. Hermetism and Anthropogony*, p. 11, Rudolph clarifies the position of the *hafiqia mia* in the various cosmological schemes found in the Mandaean sources. Also see Svend Palss, *Mandaean Studies*, Amsterdam, 1974, Reprint, p. 78.

the House of Life if it is unworthy, then the soul is overcome by *hafiqia mia* and remains in one of the purgatories, receiving punishment until the final judgement.

The origin of *hafiqia mia* has long been traced to Persian sources.³⁶ Wilhelm Brandt hypothesized that the Mandaeen waters were modeled on the Persian "stream of tears" which the soul must cross over after death.³⁷ In a Pahlavi text called *Sad Dar*, we find the stream of tears described as follows:

The thirty-sixth subject is this: when any one departs to that other world it is not proper for others that they should utter an outcry, maintain grief and make lamentation and weeping. Because every tear that issues from the eyes becomes one drop of that river before the Kinvad bridge, and then the soul of that dead person remains at that place; it is difficult for it to make a passage there, and it is not able to pass over the Kinvad bridge.³⁸

As support for the parallel between *hafiqia mia* and the "stream of tears," Brandt expanded his comparison to include the "Kinvad bridge" which linked the physical world with the after life in Persian religion. Based on several passages in the *Ginza Raba* and *Mandaean Book of John*,³⁹ Brandt argued for the existence of an analogous fixed bridge in the Mandaean sources which traversed *hafiqia mia*.⁴⁰

However, as Svend Palis has pointed out, instead of referring to a fixed bridge such as the Kinvad, Mandaean sources valorize the ritual of baptism as a symbolic bridge to the Pleroma, an observation which leads Palis to argue "against the existence of a fixed bridge like the Kinvad which everybody must cross."⁴¹ Palis continues his critique of Brandt's position by rejecting the parallel

³⁶ Wilhelm Brandt, *Das Schicksal der Seele nach dem Tode nach mandäischen und parthischen Vorstellungen* (Jahrbuch für protestantische Theologie XVIII Braunschweig, 1892) pp. 406-411, 57-58, 63.

³⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 422-423.

³⁸ *Sad Dar*, Sec. 96 1-2, as cited in Palis, *Mandaean Studies*, p. 73. Also see, *Das Schicksal der Seele*, pp. 427-428.

³⁹ For a list of the passages and their important features see Palis, *Mandaean Studies*, p. 85.

⁴⁰ See Wilhelm Brandt, *Die mandäische Religion*, p. 16.

⁴¹ In Mandaean sources the name *Jordan* is given to any body of water which is used for baptism. In addition to the earthly rivers which are named Jordan, the soul is baptized in like-named celestial counterparts during its ascent.

⁴² Palis, *Mandaean Studies*, p. 85. The Zoroastrian motif of a bridge to the after life was, however, adopted by Mandaean sources, such as the following Mandaean prayer cited by Hans-Joachim Klimkeit in *Corpus on the Silk Road: Gnostic Text from Central Asia*, San Francisco, 1983, p. 8: "May the bridge be wide, I would cross it without hesitation or doubt."

between *hafiqā mīa* and the stream of tears because it is strongly linked to the erroneous parallel between the Kinviad bridge and a non-existent Mandaeic analog. "Neither am I able to agree with him [Brandt] when he declares that the idea of 'the waters of Life' [Pallis' translation of *hafiqā mīa*] originated in the Pers. stream of tears, as this opinion is based on the assumption that *h'Apkka mīa* is the water under the Kinviad bridge."¹⁵ Unfortunately Pallis does not offer a convincing alternative to Brandt's clearly flawed theory for the origin of the *hafiqā mīa*.¹⁶

Instead of a Persian theory of origin, a biblical source for the Mandaeic *hafiqā mīa* offers many advantages. Foremost among them is the linguistic analogy between the Mandaeic *hafiqā mīa* and the Hebrew expressions *afiqē mayim* and *afiqē yam*, whose relevant biblical appearances occur in Psalms 18 and II Samuel 22 respectively. In these parallel passages the terms *afiqē yam* and *afiqē mayim* signify the cosmic waters which must be re-defeated by God in order to save the righteous individual, who is "drawn up out of the mighty waters" by God.

In order to uncover the overall relevance of the biblical tradition to the Mandaeic sources, I cite the biblical passages at length:

1. II Samuel 22:5-29

5 For the breakers of Death encompassed me
The torrents of Belial terrified me
6 The snares of Sheol encircled me
The toils of Death engulfed me
7 In my anguish I called on the Lord
Cried out to my God.
In His Abode [hekkala] He heard my voice
My cry entered His ears
14 The LORD thundered forth from Heaven
16 The bed of the sea [*afiqē yam*] was exposed.
The foundations of the world were laid bare
17 He reached down from on high. He took me
Drew me out of the mighty waters [*mayim rahun*]

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Pallis' hypothesis concerning the origin of the *hafiqā mīa*, namely that *hafiqā mīa* was the ancient name for the waters of baptism, which later became identified with the Jordan, and that a frequent translation of *hafiqā mīa* as "the waters of life" are problematic, though interesting. See Pallis, *Mandaean Studies*, p. 24.

¹⁷ As translated in *Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (New York, 1985).

II. Psalms 18: 4-29

5 Ropes of Death encompassed me
 torrents of Beaal terrified me,
 ropes of Sheol encircled me
 snares of Death confronted me
 7 In my distress I called on the LORD
 cried out to my God
 in His temple (*hekkhal*) He heard my voice.
 my cry to Him reached His ears
 14 Then the LORD thundered from heaven.
 16 The ocean bed (*afiqe mayim*) was exposed
 the foundations of the world were laid bare
 17 He reached down from on high, He took me,
 He drew me out of the mighty waters (*mayim rabim*)¹²

The biblical passages employ a number of terms to signify the destructive waters which threaten to overwhelm David, including the parallel expressions *afiqe ram* II Sam. 22 and *afiqe mayim* Ps. 18. In order to save David from these waters, God descends on a cherub from his *hekkhal*, shooting lightning, roaring and blasting his breath. After exposing the *afiqe mayim/sam*, God reaches down and draws David out of the "mighty waters"

Similar depictions of a divine being reaching down and saving individuals from destructive cosmic waters are found throughout Mandaean literature, where these waters are called by the parallel Mandaic name *hafiqua mia*. The *Canonical Prayerbook*, describes the soul's rescue from the waters as follows

1. She (the soul) proceeded in the vesture of Yuzataq Manda-d-Hna and went onwards and reached the Waters of Death (*hafiqua mia*). The waters covered her, but Radiance ~~came~~ crossed over — his name alone in his *stanta*, honouren and chosen, he created himself and said "Life, I am Thine, and for Thy name's sake came I forth from the world of Prahil from amongst evil ~~parts~~ and from beneath the throne of Abadur the Ancient so that we may bring out this soul of N. of this *manqia* so that she cometh before him"

He is a ray of the great radiance of Life, a being who resteth upon the *stantas*, and upon the *stantas* doth his name rest

He graspeth her (the soul) with the palm of his right hand and handeth her over to two 'uthras, sons of light, to Adatan and Yadatan, of one *gnas* and one mund

¹² Ibid

¹³ *Canonical Prayerbook*, pp. 45-46

¶ The soul fleeth and travelleth on untill she reacheth spiritus of Purgatory [*mataroua*]. The spiritus of Purgatory abased their heads and the soul passed the purgatory spiritus by. The soul fleeth and goeth untill she came to the waters of death [*hapiqua mia*] there came forth towards her a great beam of radiance and of life who grasped her by the palm of her right hand and brought her over the waters of death [*hapiqua mia*]. The soul fleeth and goeth untill she reacheth the House of Life.¹⁸

The Mandaeon motif of the cosmic waters must be seen within the broader context of late antique cosmological traditions. Jewish, Christian and Gnostic sources all depict heavenly water. Some of these sources also emphasize that the ascending soul or individual will encounter this water during the heavenly journey. The image of heavenly water appears in Justin's *Book of Baruch*, Hippolytus, *Haer.* 5.26 and 5.27.3 and the Nag Hammadi treatise *Melechizadek* (CG IX.8).¹⁹ The most detailed Gnostic description of heavenly water is in the treatise *Zostrianos* (CG VIII.18-5.9), which mentions the presence of water at the end of the ecstatic ascent: "The great male invisible perfect Mind, the perfect Protophanes has his own water, as you [will see] when you arrive at his place." This text is also significant insofar as it links this water with a specific being, just as Mandaeon sources link the cosmic waters with Abathur.

The view that one encounters water in heaven was common in Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature. For example, the *Testament of Levi* 2.7 declares "And I entered from the first heaven and saw a huge sea hanging there", the *Testament of Abraham* 8 states "And Michael went out and took Abraham in the body of a cloud and lifted him up to the river Ocean", while 2 *Enoch* 3.3 states "They placed me on the first heaven and showed me a very great sea, greater than the earthly sea."²⁰

While these passages merely mention the existence of heavenly water, Rev. 22.1 likens the heavenly water to crystal: "he showed me a river of living water as clear as crystal proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb" and Rev. 4.6 describes "a sea of

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 62-63.

¹⁹ G. Stroumsa discusses these traditions in "After A Gnostic" in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, Vol. II, ed. Bentley Layton, Leiden, 1981, p. 817.

²⁰ See Christopher Rowland's discussion of these traditions and their possible relationship with R. Akiba's warning in *The Visions of God in Apocalyptic Literature: Journeys for the Study of Judaism* (Cambridge, 1983) pp. 147-149 and *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York 1982) pp. 225ff.

glass like unto crystal"¹ Christopher Rowland has traced the apocalyptic identification of heavenly water with crystal to the combination of biblical verses such as Ez. 1:22 where the firmament between God and the *hayyot* is likened to crystal and Gen. 1:7, where the upper and lower waters in heaven are separated by a firmament. As Rowland writes: "Indeed the link between the water and the firmament here [in Gen. 1:7] could explain the resemblance of the sea in Rev. 4 to crystal for the juxtaposition of water and the firmament in Gen. could easily have led to the comparison of the firmament to crystal found in Ez. 1:22."²

The link between heavenly water and some kind of solid substance (crystal or glass) recalls a famous passage from the Babylonian Talmud known as Rabbi Akiba's "Water Warning." In the same section of the Talmud where Aher's disastrous encounter with Metatron appears we find the following warning:

When you arrive at the stones of pure marble, do not say 'Water' Water' for it is said, 'The speaker of lies shall not be established before my eyes.' (Babylonian Talmud Hagigah 14b)

In addition to the Babylonian Talmud the water episode appears in several places in the Hekhalot literature including Synopse §§259-345, 408-410, and 672.³ Unlike the talmudic account, at b. i.

¹ "Actually the sea of glass like unto crystal" in Rev. 4 is not really water at all but a crystal-like substance. Rev. 15:2 also refers to a sea of glass but omits the reference to crystal.

² "The Visions of God in Apocalyptic Literature," p. 148.

³ The relationship between the talmudic and Hekhalot versions of the episode has been discussed by numerous scholars. In his *org. studies* Scholem writes in *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* p. 3 that "Nothing could be more far-fetched than to treat . . . one of the Hekhalot accounts as a *post festum* interpretation of the Talmudic passage . . . Ephraim . . . Ha-Mesorot of Torat ha-hodot in *Torat ha-Tannaim*," p. 16, who counters that the Hekhalot passages are "nothing but an amplification" of the Talmudic account. J. Hamaar Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* p. 88, who argues that the Hekhalot sources preserve the tradition more extensively and originally than the Talmud. Peter Schäfer, *Hekhalot Studies* 17-24, 210, who maintains that the Hekhalot version of the water episode represents an independent tradition vis-à-vis the Babylonian Talmud and P. Lehmann argues that the water episode originally existed outside of the *pardes* tradition, was only combined with it after the *pardes* story had been recast as an ascent. And David Halperin, who in *The Messianic in Rabbinic Literature* p. 89, believes that in recasting the Hekhalot accounts "later efforts to interpret BT's cryptic narrative," Halperin changes his view in *The Faces of the Chariot*, however, where he concludes that the earliest form of the tradition is Synopse §259 which does not link the illusion of the water with the marble stones of the *pardes*. Furthermore, on p. 206 Halperin declares that "Precisely because text [in Synopse §259] gives no hint that it is directly linked to BT Hag. 14b, we can use it with some confidence as an independent witness to the ideas underlying that source. It is surely, as Scholem says,

one" of the Hekhalot passages locate the water at the sixth palace (*hekhal*) and several threaten decapitation or mutilation by "iron axes" to those foolish enough to mistake the "stones of pure marble" for water.⁴ What follows are two examples from the Hekhalot literature:

I. Synopsis §259

The guardians of the gate of the sixth palace (*hekhal*) throw and hurl upon him thousands and thousands of waves of water. Yet there is not a single drop there. If he should say "What is the nature of these waters?" they run after him and stone him. They say to him: "Empty one, perhaps you are from the seed of those who kissed the calf and you are not worthy to see the king and his throne." If this is true, a heavenly voice goes forth from Arabet Raqia: "Woe, you have spoken! He is from the seed of those who kissed the calf and is not worthy to see the king and his throne." He does not move from there before they throw upon him thousands and thousands of iron axes.⁵

II. Synopsis §409

This is to be a sign for generations, that one must not err at the gate of the sixth palace and see the splendor of the an [im]mortal stones and ask, and say, "They are water." Thus he will bring himself into danger. For even if he is not worthy to see the king in his glory, he should not ask concerning the art of the splendor of the stones of pure marble which were hewn into the palace, for then they do not destroy him, but judge him in the secret of merit (*kaf zehut*), saying: "He is not worthy to see the king or his beauty, [but] how did he enter into the six palaces?"⁶

These Hekhalot passages recall certain important features of the Mandaean traditions concerning heavenly water. First of all, this

no post festum interpretation of the Talmudic passage. See also Joseph Dan, "The Entrance to the Sixth Gate," in *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6, 1-2, Jerusalem 1983, pp. 197-200. However, the most extensive and best review of scholarship on the water episode is R. Reubman, "Die Wasser Episode in der Hekhalot-Literatur," *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 16, 1989, pp. 1-100.

⁴ Take the version of Synopsis §267, which all mentions the sixth *hekhal*. As Peter Schäfer, *Hekhalot Studien*, p. 244, has already noted, however, Synopsis §267 "obviously cites the version from the Babylonian Talmud."

⁵ Synopsis §§438 and 440 mention decapitation by the head and decapitation by iron axes, respectively. Synopsis §259 declares that "they throw upon him thousands and thousands of iron axes." Synopsis §§409 and 345 are more vague.

⁶ MS New York B128 adds, "in his beauty."

⁷ Schäfer §267. Translation based primarily on MS Oxford 153. This passage also appears in Wertheimer's edition of *Hekhalot Rabbati* as Chapter 26:2.

⁸ Translation based primarily on MS Oxford.

water is located toward the end of a heavenly journey, after the ascending individual has already passed through a series of *matlaria* ("watchhouses" or *hekhalot* "palaces" respectively). The encounter with the cosmic water is fraught with danger in both Mandaeen and Hekhalot sources. The water functions as a final obstacle before the individual can enter the divine abode, the House of Life or seventh *hekhal*. The literary proximity of the water warning to the Aher/Metatron encounter suggests that the two passages may be read together and that the illusion of water is located near Metatron just as the water is located above the throne of Abathur in Mandaeen sources. Finally, the version in §409 links the heavenly water with a scene of weighing and judgement: "judge him to the scale of merit" precisely the cluster of motifs in the Mandaeen texts where Abathur weighs the soul to determine whether it is worthy to cross the waters and enter the world of light.

There is, however, an extremely significant difference between the Merkabah and Mandaeen traditions. According to the latter, the water at the end of the heavenly journey is real, whereas the former emphasize that the water is not real but an illusion. Indeed, the ability to recognize the illusory waters for what they really are, e.g. the "stones of pure marble," is the only way to avoid being ignominiously dispatched by the angelic guardians. The water episode may be read as a warning against those who expect to see water at the end of a heavenly journey. Since the motif of heavenly water appears in Mandaeen, Gnostic and Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature, the Talmudic and Hekhalot traditions may even have a polemical orientation. Unlike the adherents of these other traditions, who believe in the existence of heavenly water before the divine abode, the truly enlightened Merkabah mystic knows that what others think is water is actually stone, or the "air of the splendor of the stones of pure marble." In their minds, this special knowledge elevates the adherents of Merkabah mysticism above those of other late antique ascent traditions.

The possibility that the "Water Warning" may have functioned as a polemic against Mandaeen cosmological beliefs gains support from two other details in the Hekhalot versions of the episode. None of the Hekhalot sources, except for §6² which parallels the Talmudic account, ascribe their description to the stones of pure marble. Instead, they describe the exact cause of the illusion produced by the stones as either the "air of splendor" *ayy grr* or "splendor of air" *ayy ayw* of the stones. David Halperin has argued that these expressions

'are best explained as based on a mistaken reading of *me or zuw*' which appears in MS New York's version of §408 instead of *aww zuw*.¹⁹

I would like to suggest that the significance of the phrases *zuw aww* and *aww zuw* may be illuminated by yet another Mandaeen cosmological tradition. In a number of Mandaeen accounts, a divine being called Radiance or *zuwa* leads the soul over the *hafiqia mia* to the World of Light.

I. The soul fleeth and goeth until she came to the waters of death [*hafiqia mia* there came forth towards her a great beam of radiance [*zuwa*] and of life who grasped her by the palm of her right hand and brought her over the waters of death [*hafiqia mia*].²⁰

II. The waters covered her, (but) Radiance [*zuwa*] crossed over - his name abode in his *skintia*: honoured and chosen, he created himself — He is a ray [*israh*] of the great radiance [*zuwa*] of life: a being who resteth upon the *skintia* and upon the *skintia* doth his name rest. He graspeth her [the soul] with the palm of his right hand and handeth her over to two 'uthras, sons of light, to Adatan and Yaldan, of one *gnosis* and one mind.

Other Mandaean passages describe a substance called the *ayaz zuwa* or 'air of splendor' which surrounds the world and is personified as a divine being. As Drower writes:

Ayaz-Ziwa. 'Ether Brilliance' or 'radiant ether'. With the Mandaeans this rare and purer atmosphere is represented as interpenetrating the thick air round the earth and giving it vital qualities. This Ether is personified, and is sometimes mentioned as a source of life.

The personification of the air or ether appears in numerous Mandaean texts including *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship*, which describes part of the initiation ritual for the *tarmida* or low ranking Mandaean priest and refers frequently to the hymns or

¹⁹ *Faces of the Christ*, p. 206.

²⁰ *Canonical Prayerbook*, p. 63.

Ibid., pp. 45-46.

²¹ E. S. Drower *The Mandaean of Iraq and Iran*, p. 58. Also see J. J. Buckley, *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship*, p. 12 and elsewhere.

that this illusion and the "air radiance" are both linked to the stones of the hekhal, i. e., the chief cosmological structure of their own tradition. The polemical focus of the episode may even include the warning not to say "water, water" or "they are water" for in a number of Mandaean rituals, the individual makes statements concerning water, including the following from the priestly initiation: 'And when he says, 'Bound is the sea' (CP 15), seven walls of iron surround him, those that enclose Haasum, the First Kusta.... For Haasum Kusta is the soul that comes and settles on his head and surrounds herself with seven walls of the white waters'.¹⁵ Here we find an explicit declaration concerning the waters which causes seven walls of iron to surround the individual in a protective fashion (in another text, Abathur is called "hard iron that is strong").¹⁶ In the Hekhalot text, by contrast, the declaration concerning water causes axes of iron to kill the individual.

A final element of the Hekhalot versions of the "Water Warning" which may suggest a polemical context is the condemnation "He is from the seed of those who kissed the calf" applied to the individual who mistakes the stones for water. According to a number of rabbinic sources, the golden calf was either created by the "mixed multitude" which left Egypt with the Israelites, as cited in Ex. 12:38 and Numbers 1:4, or by Egyptian magicians.¹⁷ Thus in Song Raba 14, Rabbi Judah quotes in the name of Rabbi Aha "The Egyptian magicians performed sorceries, and it [the calf] appeared to leap before them [the Israelites]."

Although the condemnation may refer to heretics in general, the formulation may also hint at a more specific focus. In a number of legends, the Mandaeans link their ancestors with the Egyptians though they also claim ties to Judaism and mention that Misa was against the Mandai and had quarreled with them in Egypt.¹⁸ The

¹⁵ *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship*, pp. 4-5. The phrase "Bound is the sea" comes from *The Canonical Prayerbook* 15, p. 1.

¹⁶ E. S. Drower, *The Thousand and Twelve Questions*, p. 17.

¹⁷ See Louis Ginzburg, *Legends of the Jews*, Vol. 6, 1942-47, p. 52, n. 267, for a list of the rabbinic passages concerning these verses.

¹⁸ For information on the golden calf in post-biblical literature, see Levy-Strauss and Moshe Aberbach, "The Golden Calf Episode in Post-biblical Literature," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 39 (1968), pp. 9-11. On p. 10, n. 1, the authors provide a list of the rabbinic passages which describe the Egyptian magicians or "mixed multitude" as creating the golden calf, including BT Shabbat 99a, Exod. Rabba: XII 7, etc.

¹⁹ *The Mandaean in Iraq and Iran*, pp. 259-260, esp. 261. Also see E. S. Drower, *The Secret Adam*, p. 20.

same tradition declares that the Mandaeans "went out of Egypt and came to the sea which became shut off leaving a road with mountains of sea on either side." Indeed, Drower has written that "Yearly a ritual meal is eaten in memory of the Egyptian hosts who perished in the waters when following the wicked Jews."⁴⁰ The Mandaeans describe the events at Sinai as a deplorable event involving the creation of a wretched people, whose prophet Moses served the earthly rulers Raha and Adonai, not the true God.⁴¹ It should be pointed out that these traditions appear in oral form and in Mandaean folk ritual and were recorded by Drower during the twentieth century. Whether or not they existed in the pre or early Islamic period is open to conjecture.

The Jewish tradition portraying the Egyptians or mixed multitude as the makers of the golden calf combined with the Mandaean identification with the Egyptians, deragation of the revelation at Sinai, and general hostility to Judaism may have inspired a Jewish polemic which identified the Mandaeans as the mixed multitude who left Egypt with the Israelites and therefore as the makers of the golden calf. Unfortunately, we do not know enough about the forms of Jewish polemics in Late Antiquity nor do we know to which groups the various "minim" (the most common rabbinic term for heretics) belonged. It is possible that among the heretics condemned in rabbinic literature were the Mandaeans and that the "Water Warning" is directed against those Jews who were attracted to Mandaean cosmological beliefs.

The motif of heavenly water appears in Jewish apocalyptic sources but its adoption by Christian apocalyptic circles (Gnosticism and Mandaeism) may have encouraged the authors of the Merkabah texts to reject it. Were it known to the authors of the *Lamud* or the *Hekhalot* passages, the Mandaean formulation of the heavenly waters would have been particularly disturbing because of its many close parallels with the Merkabah tradition. As the "proximate Other" in terms of cosmological motifs, language, Mandaeic and the Aramaic of the Babylonian *Lamud* are very similar, and geographical location, Mandaeans and Jews lived in close proximity in Babylonia, the Mandaeans would have posed a particular challenge to any Babylonian Jews involved in Merkabah mysticism.

⁴⁰ *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran*, p. 10.

⁴¹ *Gnostica: A Selection of Texts*, p. 296, n. 1.

Mandaeans themselves were hardly shy in their attacks on Judaism. For example, the Mandaean term for Jews, *isahutana*, was understood as a pun which connected Jews with "abortion" or "miscarriage" and "sin."¹⁰² Yet the Mandaeans also understood their religion as originally linked to Judaism. Thus, *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship* depicts Judaism as the stage prior to Mandaism which must be cast off by the individual: "The first, outer casting off is when he leaves from the *asotia* or 'ban' of the Jews to be clothed with mandaeism [here understood as Mandaean lay status and therefore Buckley puts it in lower case]. The second casting off is the casting off of mandaeism [lay status] to be clothed in priestly status *tarnaduta*."¹⁰³ Mandaean polemic thus depicts Judaism as a stage prior to Mandaism, a kind of untorn or undeveloped tradition, i.e. an "abortion."

The "Water Warning" may thus be understood as a very sophisticated polemic against a heretical belief in heavenly water, perhaps specifically focusing on Mandaean beliefs. Instead of denying the existence of such water outright, the Jewish sources acknowledge that something which looks like water does exist at the end of the heavenly journey but only those "from the seed of those who kissed the calf" — i.e. heretics — mistakenly take the illusion to be reality. Those who are in the know, however, realize that the appearance of water is actually produced by the stones of the heavenly palace.

¹⁰² *A Mandaean Dictionary*, p. 184b. *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship*, p. 42, n. 298.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

CHAPTER SIX

SABAOth'S REHABILITATION

A figure named Sabaoth appears in a number of Gnostic works from the Nag Hammadi library and in the writings of the early Christian heresiologists. In this chapter, I will focus on his role in the Gnostic documents known as the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, HypArch and *On the Origin of the World*, OnOrigWld. It seems probable that HypArch, like its neighbors in the Nag Hammadi library, was originally written in Greek and then translated into Coptic. Although widely discussed, the provenance and date of the document are still debated. Nevertheless, the date of the traditions must be prior to the fourth century date of the codex. A great deal of scholarship has been prosecuted on HypArch in the form of critical editions, general studies, and highly specialized articles.

Like HypArch, OnOrigWld was probably composed in Greek and translated into Coptic. Its date and provenance are similarly unfixed.

CG II,4 Also called *The Nature of the Archons*. The Coptic title of the work is given at the end of the codex as *I-hypostasi n-sarkhon* which clearly reflects its Greek origin.

(CG II,4) Formerly known as the *Untitled Text*.

On this text see P. Nages, *Die Wesen der Archonten* (*Wissenschaftliche Beiträge der Martin Luther Universität Halle-Wittenberg*, Halle 1988), pp. 111-112. On the possibility of Egypt as the provenance for the text, cf. H.-C. Puech, "Les nouveaux textes grecs découverts à El-Hadi, Égypte," in *Coptic Studies in Honor of Walter Loring Grafton* (Boston, 1986), p. 22. Roger Bullard, "Introduction," to *Nag Hammadi Codex II* 2-3 Vol. One ed. Brainerd Layton in *Nag Hammadi Studies* XX, eds. Marvin Krause, James Robinson, Frederick Wisse, Leiden, 1989, p. 221, notes that an Egyptian provenance is "no more than tentative because of the quantity of scriptural evidence." Hans-Martin Schenke has attributed HypArch to his hypothesis as a copy of Sethian documents, cf. "Das sethianische System nach Nag-Hammadi Handschriften," in *Studia Coptica: Festschrift für die Ägyptologen* 15, ed. P. Nages, Berlin, 1984, and "The Phenomenon and Significance of Gnostic Sethianism," in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism II: a Sethian provenance has also been suggested by Layton.*

The Hypostasis of the Archons: "The Reality of the Rulers," *Harvard Theological Review* 67, 1974, pp. 3-11, R. A. Bullard, *The Hypostasis of the Archons* (*Patristische Texte und Studien* 31, Berlin 1966), p. 225, argues for an Ophite origin for the first part of the text, and a heavy Valentinian influence on the second part; in his "Introduction," to *Nag Hammadi Codex II* 2-3, Vol. I, p. 224, however, Bullard suggests that any identification of the text with a specific Gnostic sect must be accompanied by a hypothesis as to the use of these sectarian names as employed by the orthodox heresiologists." This view is shared by Fallon, *The Environment of Sabaoth*, p. 1.

though not for lack of speculation.⁴ While not as extensively studied as its literary cousin, OnOrgWld has nevertheless inspired a variety of scholarly works. Two of the most pressing questions concerning these documents is their relationship to one another, and their relationship to Christianity and Judaism respectively. It is now generally accepted that a direct literary relationship between HypArch and OnOrgWld should be rejected. Instead, the two documents appear to have reworked a common set of earlier traditions. By contrast the relationship of the two texts to Christianity and Judaism remains highly contested.

According to Bentley Layton, HypArch is an "apocalyptic Christian *valentinianum ex eventu*—a Christian gnostic rewriting of Genesis and the Prophets."⁵ Elaine Pagels emphasizes the influence of Paul's writings on HypArch, suggesting that the text "mythically elaborates Paul's own exegesis."⁶ Bullard argues that the audience was a Christian Gnostic community which accepted the authority of Paul and had a wide ranging knowledge of both Old and New Testament material. The view that the Christian elements are an integral part of HypArch is not universally accepted. Most recently, Bernard Barc has suggested that the text's explicitly Christian features reflect the attempt of a hypothetical redactor to Christianize originally non-

A. Bobag and P. Lisch: *Die Apokalyptische Schrift des Irenäus: Unter II von Nag Hammadi* (Berlin 1972) pp. 3-5 suggest Egypt as the place of composition. H. M. Swete: "An Urquintel des Welt-Evangeliums gnostisch-Valentinianisch aus dem Funde von Nag Hammadi," *Historische Literaturgeschichte* 84 (1902) p. 246 and Hans Jonas, *Gnosis and Gnosticism*, *Great*, I, pp. 460-61 and 581 have argued that OnOrgWld is a Barbeloognostic document. Falton: *The Enthronement of Sabaoth*, p. 6 has refrained from assigning the text to a particular Gnostic sect until the sect themselves are better defined, although Falton does argue for Valentinian influence in the text (pp. 134-5), adding however on p. 136 that the author has not been bound by Valentinianism but developed further beyond it.

"The Hypostasis of the Archons," p. 364 Layton also writes: "the story might be considered to be non-Christian. But of course such a view would be wrong."

⁵ E. Pagels, "Genesis Creation Accounts from Nag Hammadi," in *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism, and Early Christianity*, p. 266. On 276-277, Pagels stresses the use of specifically Pauline terminology and technical vocabulary.

Bullard, "Introduction," *Nag Hammadi Under II* 2:7 Vol. One, p. 229, in *Hypostasis of the Archons*, pp. 1-3-15. Bullard seems to imply that the Christian influence is primarily redactional when he writes that "The editor of the document was Christian Gnostic, and is responsible for what Christian influence can be seen in the writing." Another view on the relationship of HypArch with Christianity is provided by J. Magnien: "L'exaltation de Sabaoth dans l'Hypostase des Archontes 143-151 et l'exaltation de Jésus dans Philippiens 2,6-11: une naissance de Jésus-Christ," *Cahiers du Cercle Émile Renan* 83, 1973 and Bernard Barc: *L'Hypostase des Archontes. Texte gnostique sur l'origine de l'homme du monde et des archontes* (Bibliothèque Latine de Nag Hammadi 3, ed. J.-E. Ménard, Québec-Louvain 1980, p. 41).

Christian material.⁴

Although they stress the importance of Christian influences on HypArch, both Layton and Pagels acknowledge that the text exhibits a deep dependence on Jewish sources and exegetical traditions. In the case of OnOrgWld, Francis Fallon proposes that apparently Christian features such as the role of Jesus Christ reflect Valentinian rather than orthodox Christian influence.⁵ Hans Bethge notes that Jewish, rather than Christian, influence is a "dominant and especially characteristic element in OnOrgWld."⁶ Birger Pearson has eloquently articulated the view that HypArch and OnOrgWld represent a Gnostic midrash on the early chapters of Genesis. Finally, a growing body of scholarly literature emphasizes the influence of Jewish apocalyptic traditions on HypArch and OnOrgWld and the many parallels between the Gnostic documents and Merkabah mysticism.

Like Metatron, Sabaoth is a complex figure who, as Francis Fallon has noted, "arises from the conflation of three figures: those of the God of the OT, the leading angels, and the apocalyptic visionary."⁷ Both HypArch and OnOrgWld depict Sabaoth as the repentant son of Ialdabaoth, the Demiurge. Although Sabaoth and Ialdabaoth are juxtaposed in these documents, other sources blur the boundaries between the two figures. Structurally, the rehabilitated Demiurge of Valentinianism and the repentant figure of Sabaoth in HypArch and OnOrgWld greatly resemble one another. In both cases, the inferior God is transformed from a negative figure into a vice regent for the higher God, once he acknowledges the latter's authority.

The ability of a figure called Sabaoth and/or Ialdabaoth to function as a vice regent of the higher God and an opponent of the Devil is attested in a number of places. According to Epiphanius,

⁴ Barc, *L'Hypothèse des Archontes*, pp. 1-48. Pagels, "Genesis Creation Accounts," p. 266, discusses this approach.

⁵ *The Esotericism of Sabaoth*, pp. 137ff.

⁶ Introduction, *Ang. Himmels Codex II* 2-7, Vol. Two, p. 14.

⁷ C. G. Ceram, *From Apocryphism to Gnosticism*, Frankfurt am Main, 1988, pp. 138ff. E. L. Edel, *Kabbalah: A New Perspective*, New Haven, 1988, p. 124; Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, p. 5. Michael Fishbane, "The 'Measures' of God's Glory in the Ancient Midrash," pp. 66-68. N. Sed, "Les Douze Hebdomades, Le Char de Sabaoth et Le Sépharot Douze Langues," *Nouveau Testament* 21, 1979, esp. 182ff.

Fallon, *The Esotericism of Sabaoth*, p. 34.

⁸ Ibid. pp. 83-8. For example, in Valentinian sources, the Demiurge himself rules the psychic class (those who have free choice and can either be saved or damned), which is composed of both Jews and orthodox Christians. Furthermore, the Demiurge is not evil, as in HypArch and OnOrgWld, but ignorant and appears willing to genuinely repent. Like Sabaoth, he is portrayed as an intermediary being, between the truly good pleromatic entities and his son, the Cosmocrator or

the Archontes considered the Demurge whom they called Sabaoth rather than Ialdabaoth — to be the God of the Jews, while they depicted the Devil as his son and opponent

And Sabaoth, they say, is the God of the Jews, and the Devil is an evil son of his, and being from earth he opposes his own father. And his father is not like him, nor again is he the incomprehensible God whom they call the Father.¹

The actual identification of Sabaoth and Ialdabaoth is reflected in the doctrine of Severus, who portrays a figure known as both Sabaoth and Ialdabaoth as an intermediary ruler between the true God and the Devil.

There is, in an unnamed highest heaven and aeon, a good God. The Devil, he says, is the son of the great ruler over the host of the powers, whom he now names Ialdabaoth, now Sabaoth. This one who was born from him is a serpent. He was cast down by the power above to the earth.

As Fossum notes: "According to both the Archontes and Severus, it is the devil, and not Sabaoth, who is responsible for the evils in the world. Sabaoth, the chief of the demurgic powers and the ruler in the seventh heaven, has retained his basic position as God's viceregent."²

Following his repentance, Sabaoth is "caught up" by Sophia and Zoe in HypArch 9: 4ff. The ascension of Sabaoth reflects the apocalyptic tradition of the ascent of the seer. As we have seen, this theme also appears in *3 Enoch*. Although Enoch is not described as repentant, he is chosen for his apotheosis because he is the only righteous individual among a generation of sinners, just as Sabaoth is the only righteous archon. After he ascends, Sabaoth is installed as the ruler of the seventh heaven, which is described as "below the veil between above and below" (HypArch 9: 20-21). The existence of a heavenly veil which separates the abode of God from the world is linked to the biblical tradition of the veil in the desert shrine (Ex 26:33) and the Holy of Holies in the Temple (2 Chr 3:14). In later Judaism, this veil was transferred to heaven, where it was called the *mylon*, the *pargod* or the *paroket*. The influence of these Jewish

Devil, who rules the *hwtic/choic* class (those destined for destruction).

¹ Pen. XLV 1f. This and the following canon are from Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, p. 303.

² Pen. XLV 1:3ff. It should be noted that the figure identified as a "serpent" is cast down" like Ialdabaoth in HypArch and OnOrgWld.

³ *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, p. 303.

traditions on the veil in HypArch, *katapetasma* and OnOrgWld (*parapetasma*) has been carefully examined by a number of scholars.

Like Sabaoth, Metatron is installed below the cosmic veil in 3 Enoch 10. Both the Gnostic and Jewish sources inherited the earlier Jewish apocalyptic tradition of a figure enthroned at the entrance of God's dwelling place. Upon his enthronement in the seventh heaven, Sabaoth receives the divine name "God of the forces," which parallels the ascension, enthronement at the entrance of the seventh hekhal, and re-naming of Metatron as the "lesser YHWH" in 3 Enoch.

In many respects, the tale of Sabaoth in OnOrgWld resembles the version in HypArch. Nevertheless, there are significant differences between the two accounts. The first feature I will examine follows the repentance of Sabaoth: "Then Pater Sophia stretched forth her finger and she poured forth upon him [Sabaoth] light from her light."¹ A close parallel to this tradition appears in 3 Enoch 13, where Metatron declares: "Out of the abundant love and great compassion wherewith the Holy One blessed be He loved and cherished me more than all the denizens of the heights, he wrote with his finger, as with a pen of flame, upon the crown which was on my head."² Although the description in OnOrgWld is more terse, the basic scenario is the same — a divine being stretches forth a finger and pours light on a vice regent figure in what appears to be a kind of anointing.

Although problematic in places, the most thorough discussion of the cosmic veil in Gnostic and Jewish sources is in C. H. Kees, *Der Vorhang vor dem Thron Gottes: eine geschichtliche Untersuchung zum Neuen Testament* 14 (Lugano, 1972). The relationship between the veil in HypArch and OnOrgWld and the veil in Jewish literature is also discussed by Fallon, *Enthronement of Sabaoth*, p. 55; Gruenwald, *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism*, pp. 21, 22; Alexander, 3 Hebrew Apocalypses of Enoch, p. 236. In *Kabbalah*, p. 18, Scholem notes that "in another form the concept of the *parpet* [i.e. to separate, to misdirect] angels from God was taken over by second-century Jewish Gnostics. For example, The Measures of Enoch's Glory in the *Amra* (Mid. 2.2.1), discusses the significance of his *kyon* in a Jewish text (Sife 355) which exhibits other parallels with Gnostic sources."

¹ OnOrgWld .04.33. Fallon, op. cit. pp. 48-95 notes that the motif of the outstretched finger occurs in two passages from intertestamental literature: Job 25.11 and Gen. 48.² and writes that "After we have a good motif from four intertestamental Jewish apocalypses in common rather than the OT or NT. On the other hand, while the finger of God is also referred to in both the OT and the NT, there is never an emission coming from it."

² Metatron is basically transformed into a Light Man, such as Michael in *Testament of Reuben*. Fallon, *Enthronement of Sabaoth*, pp. 91-94, notes the parallel between the intertestamental Jewish tradition of the Light Man and the "Man and his light" (a separate figure from Sabaoth in OnOrgWld .04.24).

The next set of features involves the ascension and enthronement of Sabaoth. After Sabaoth is snatched up to the seventh heaven, Pstia Sophia establishes a kingdom for him above the twelve gods of Chaos. OnOrgWld 104:23-26 Sabaoth fashions a dwelling place and a throne-chariot called Cherubin whose forms *morphai* amount to sixty-four forms and seven archangels who stand before him. It is he who is the eighth since he has authority. All the forms amount to seventy-two for from this chariot the seventy-two gods received a pattern. They received a pattern to rule the seventy-two languages of the nations." OnOrgWld 104:33-105:16. This section has many parallels with Merkabah material and specifically with the depiction of Metatron in *1 Enoch*. Thus in chapter 3, Metatron declares "I have seventy names, corresponding to the seventy nations [or "tongues" of the world]" while chapter 17 mentions "seventy-two princes of the kingdoms in the heigat, corresponding to the seventy-two nations of the world." Both Sabaoth and Metatron are clearly being invested with the authority of God's vice regent.

The creation of angels in OnOrgWld 105:6-106:3 differs from the account in HypArch in a number of ways, but one is particularly relevant. OnOrgWld depicts Sabaoth as creating a congregation [*ekklesia*] of angels, thousands and myriads. This detail almost certainly reflects the influence of Daniel 7 where the Ancient of Days is depicted in like language.²⁸ As we have seen, Merkabah sources also employed imagery from Daniel 7 to characterize the vice regent figures Metatron and Akmael. Like these Jewish angelic vice regents, Sabaoth is therefore depicted as the Ancient of Days from Daniel 7:9-10 — an enthroned judge surrounded by thousands and myriads of angels.

I have thus far concentrated on the parallels between Sabaoth and Metatron, but there are also significant parallels between Abathur and Sabaoth. Both Abathur and Sabaoth are depicted as judges enthroned at the entrance of the World of Light. Each figure is intimately related to the actual demerger of the world either as his father or his son. Furthermore, both Abathur and Sabaoth are depicted as creators in their own right. Abathur creates Ptahu and Sabaoth creates a host of angelic beings. Indeed if we accept the

²⁸ As noted by Fallon, *Enthronement of Sabaoth*, p. 106. Cf. *1 Enoch* 4:22-60:1-7, 8 Rev. 5:11.

link between the name Abathur and the title "father [aba] of the uthras," there is a precise analogy with Sabaoth since the original form of the name Sabaoth was *yahwe seba ot* or *du yahwe seba ot*, meaning "he who creates the [heavenly] hosts".² The parallel I would like to focus on, however, is that both Abathur and Sabaoth are portrayed as rehabilitated figures.

In a number of ways, the Mandaean figures Yoshamin, Alathur, and Ptah, resemble the fallen angels of *I Enoch* 6-16.³ The connection between the Mandaean utras and the fallen angels is primarily, but not solely, based on their common fall from grace following an act of rebellion. Another important but less obvious parallel between the two sets of figures is that both are related to the image of a polluted priesthood. We have already seen that Yoshamin, Abathur, and Ptah were characterized as heavenly priests who corrupted themselves by rebelling against the Great Life. A number of scholars have argued that the fall of the angels in *I Enoch* 6-16 should be interpreted as a mythically formulated attack on the polluted or fallen priests in Jerusalem.⁴ On a mythical level, therefore, the fallen angels symbolize the fallen priests.

David Suter has suggested further that the chief sin of the fallen angels was their improper sexual union with human women.⁵ The emphasis on the sexual nature of the angels' sin mirrors the extreme concern for the sexual purity and contemporary pollution of the human priesthood. It is unclear to what degree the fall of angels such as Yoshamin, Abathur, and Ptah is linked to the issues of sexual purity and pollution. In general, however, these issues are extremely important in Mandaeon mythology and ritual.⁶ For

² See Frank Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, pp. 69-70.

³ Carl Kraeling, "The Mandaeon Gese Ptah," p. 115 has written that Ptah, approximately at his worst, "only" the fallen angels or the revolting Lucifer and the demiurge archons of Manichaeism.

⁴ See George Nickensburg, "Enoch, Levi, and Peter: Recipients of Revelation in Upper Galilee," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 100 (1981), pp. 589-591; David Suter, "Fallen Angel, Fallen Priest: The Problem of Family Purity in *I Enoch* 6-16," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 50, 1979. On the mythical character of *I Enoch* 6-16 and its affinities with Greek and ancient Near Eastern traditions, cf. Paul Hanson, "Rebellion in Heaven: Azazel and Eubermenean Heroes in *I Enoch* 6-16," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96 (1977).

⁵ P. S. Alexander, "The Targumim and Early Exegesis on Sons of God in Genesis 6," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 11 (1972), p. 61, writes: "*I Enoch* 6-16 is an elaborate midrash on Gen 6-8 (where the sons of god intermarry with the 'daughters of men')."

The "rehabilitated" Abathur, however, is portrayed as encouraging John the Baptist to "take a wife" and start a family.

example, in the *Ginza* the light being Hibil Ziwa, who is sometimes identified with Abathur, descends to the World of Darkness.²⁶ Pretending to be one of the demons, Hibil so impresses Ruha's mother Qin, that she gives him her other daughter, Zazariel, in marriage. Hibil Ziwa, however, is extremely careful not to consummate the marriage with Zazariel, presumably because he wants to avoid sexual pollution.²⁷ The importance of sexual purity for heavenly priests is also emphasized in the depictions of Sislam Raba as the archetype of the proper bridegroom and priest.²⁸

The requirement of sexual purity for angelic priests is mirrored by the strict sexual regulation of human priests in Mandaeism. Thus, a priest must come from a priestly family; he cannot be the son of a woman guilty of adultery, nor the son by a second marriage of a widow. Furthermore, he cannot be physically blemished (circumcised, impotent or a eunuch). He must marry and his wife must come from a priestly family, be a virgin at the time of marriage, and neither she nor the instructor's wife can be menstruating during the period of priestly ordination.²⁹

The key difference between the fallen uthra priests in Mandaeism and the fallen angelic priests in *I knuch b'ab* is that the fallen uthras

²⁶ *Ginza*, pp. 50, 73. This account is discussed by J. J. Hankley, "The Rehabilitation of Spirit Ruha," pp. 61ff.

²⁷ Elsewhere, however, Prath is described as the son of Hibil Ziwa and Zazariel, not as a son of her. Packard, *Light*, 4. Drawer, *The Mandaeism of Iraq and Iran*, p. 95, n. 5 and p. 271, where Zazariel "bore him [Hibil Ziwa] a son, Prath." Furthermore, the Hibil Ziwa's rejection of Zazariel in this passage could not be taken as an indication of sexual abstinence since in *The Ginza of Rumi*, pp. 182ff. Hibil Ziwa is credited with the origin of sexual intercourse which is portrayed as a positive act: "I [Hibil Ziwa] opened living waters and gave them to the bridegroom; it was my work to drink. I sowed in them pregnancies and birth and with sexual desire I enflamed them and caused love to dwell in both of them. They will live and be happy and I, the Messenger, Hibil, have performed and arranged that which my Father commanded me. And fate is victorious and victorious the man who went hence."

²⁸ See Drawer, *The Thousand and Twelve Questions*, p. 265. "Sislam Raba is the archetype of bridegroom and priest. In both aspects he brings good fortune, prosperity, divinity. As bridegroom he represents the Divine Creator in its male manifestation at the moment of its union with its female manifestation. Hence Sislam's union with his bride 'alat re-enacts that of the Aba'ama, Father and Mother, and brings prosperity to the community and fecundity to the soul." See also Yamauchi, *Gnostic Ethics and Mandaeism*, pp. 49-50 for a discussion of this issue.

²⁹ For a list and discussion of these elements, see Yamauchi, *Gnostic Ethics and Mandaeism*, p. 43. *The Thousand and Twelve Questions*, p. 197 states that "a eunuch resembleth vessels of earthenware which when broken cannot be made whole." As Liebes, "The Messiah of the Zohar," p. 28 notes the Zohar also deprecates the eunuch as one who lacks a beard and therefore lacks *hadrai panim*, "the glory of the face" as well as the power and voice of a man.

are rehabilitated and the fallen angels are not. Like Abathur and his kin, Sabaoth is rehabilitated in HypArch and OnOrgWld. The rehabilitation of Abathur and Sabaoth is extremely significant for it allows them to represent God's interests in the sub-pleromatic realm and to function as God's vice-regent. It also provides a model or paradigm for human beings to emulate. All human beings are, in effect, fallen figures according to Gnostic and Mandaean doctrine. The rehabilitation of Abathur and Sabaoth therefore signifies the potential for profound transformation, even rehabilitation, of human beings.

The rehabilitation of these fallen figures also represents a step away from a radical dualism between earthly and pleromatic powers toward a more ambivalent theological position.²⁰ In her work on the Mandaean figures Ruha and Sita, J. J. Buckley has repeatedly emphasized that the common scholarly interpretation of Mandaeism as an essentially dualistic phenomenon must be re-evaluated in light of the great importance of intermediate theological figures and categories. Instead of a dualistic view of Mandaeism, Buckley supports a tripartite model. Within this structure, opposing elements are separated and mediated by figures and categories that are between and between.

According to Buckley, the focus on dualism has prevented scholars from apprehending the basic ambivalence of figures like Ruha. Although Ruha is frequently portrayed as a negative being of the World of Darkness, she is also described as having a positive heavenly dimension in Mandaean sources. Furthermore, there is a correspondence between the divine figure Ruha and the anthropological category *ruha*, which signifies the human spirit, an entity which exists between the body and soul, and is a necessary component in the salvation of the individual.

²⁰ See the comments of Jonas in *Gnosticism and Gnosticism* (Oxford 1963) p. 33: "what the middle beings were to 'mediate' was exactly the realization of otherwise merely abstract dualism." and p. 337, n. 2, "The basic thought of atonement for the demiurge entity... precisely because of his being... is of extraordinary (Gnostic) significance." As noted by J. J. Buckley, *Female Fault and Fulfillment* (p. 24) 5-6, pp. 4-5, where Buckley describes the figure of Elohim as "neither good nor evil as follows: A middle and, seemingly, a mediating being. Elohim makes the dualistic explicit and arguably real. He is the cause of the separations, and he is the first to realize the implications of these: his own trapped spirit perfectly parables his imprisoned life in the upper world."

Concerning the *ruha*, Buckley, *Female Fault and Fulfillment* (p. 2) writes "Situated between body and soul, the spirit, always regarded as female, wavers between good

The key to understanding the ambivalence of Ruha and other Mandaeic figures is the concept of the *dmuta* or "ideal heavenly counterpart"²⁰ As Buckley writes:

The *dmuta* expresses, moreover, the paradoxical fact that entities may show themselves as both good and evil: may possess both higher and lower characteristics. Not only human beings, but also deities of the Light World possess Ruha among them: have their "upper images" in *Munia kusta* [a region of the upper or ideal world]. The *dmuta* furnishes a solution to the static, dualistic model: it lends a dynamic feature to Mandaeic mythological thought as well as to the anthropological speculation.²¹

Like Ruha, Abathur has a lower incarnation, known as Abathur Mazzaia, Abathur of the Scales, and an ideal heavenly counterpart or *dmuta*, known as Abathur Rama, Abathur the Lusty. Abathur's split personality mirrors his ambivalent functions within Mandaeic mythology. On the one hand, by gazing below the World of Light, Abathur initiates the creation of the physical world, an act which compromises his and the Pleroma's unity. On the other hand, Abathur becomes a vehicle for the re-unification of the World of Light by identifying the perfected souls which may return to their pleromatic homeland. Thus, as both initiator of creation and judge of ascending souls, Abathur is the catalyst for change in both directions. Abathur's liminal, transformative functions are paralleled by his spatial position at the entrance of the World of Light—a location which is equally at the end of the physical world and at the beginning of the Pleroma.

I conclude my discussion with an exploration of the etymology of the name Abathur. The origin of the name Abathur has long puzzled scholars of Mandaeic religion. According to Wilhelm Brandt, the name Abathur may be read as a contraction of the words *aba* "Mandaic: father" and *uthra* "Man: divine being, similar to angel." Thus, *aba d'uthra* "father of the utras" = Abathur.

Against this explanation some scholars have supported an Iranian etymology. According to this position, the name Abathur is based

and evil between higher and lower instincts. ... Ruha and naba, then, both "between and between" are situated in the middle, and may tilt either to good or to evil.

A Mandaic Dictionary, p. 111.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 29. Buckley also discusses the *dmuta* in "Two Female Gnostic Reversals," pp. 266-267, "A Rehabilitation of Spirit Ruha," pp. 81-82.

²¹ Wilhelm Brandt, *Die Mandaen in Religion*, Leipzig, 1889, p. 51.

²² For discussions of the etymology of the name Abathur see Mark Lidzbarski

on the reconstruction Abathur = *aba (g) tur'a'* combining the two "Iranian" words *aba* "he that has" + *tura*, "balance scale," meaning "the one with the scale." However, as Svend Pallis has pointed out, the word *tura* does not exist in Iranian, and was only reconstructed by Andreas on the basis of a Sanskrit noun *tula*, "lever, beam," and a verb *tulayati*, "to weigh."¹⁴ In addition, the word *aba* only appears in Neo-Persian, indicating that the name Abathur would date from 800 C.E., which is extremely unlikely.¹⁵

In place of the unsatisfying Mandaean and Iranian reconstructions, I would like to propose a new etymology for the name Abathur. Rather than the "father of the ultras" or the "one with the scale," the name Abathur may reflect a combination of the Mandaic words *aba* = "father" and *thur a'* or *thor a'* = "bull." Thus, the name Abathur should be read "Father Bull." Although one would expect a final aleph in the Mandaic and generally Aramaic word for "bull," the name Abathur may preserve an older Aramaic or North-West Semitic form, *thur*, which lacks the definite article ending, aleph.¹⁶ In any case, personal names often do not conform to standard morphological patterns. Indeed, even if the form were originally Mandaic, it is possible that the final vowel dropped out, just as it does in the other hypothetical reconstructions we have cited: *Abā dī trē* > Abathur and *aba (g) tur'a'* > Abathur. In addition to this linguistic argument there is an intriguing matrix of associations between Abathur and another divine figure known by an epithet remarkably close to "Father Bull," namely the Canaanite god El.

In a number of passages, El is referred to as *tūru 'l abuhū* or "Bull El his father."¹⁷ In these passages, the "son" in question is the storm god Baal. The name Abathur looks remarkably like a metathesis of

Das Johannesevangelium der Mandäer, p. XXIX and Karl Rudolph, *Theogonie, Kosmogonie und Anthropogonie*, pp. 22-23. Both scholars base their views on Andreas' artificial Iranian etymology.

¹⁴ Svend Pallis, *Mandaean Studies* (Amsterdam 1974), p. 111.

¹⁵ Ibid. *passim*, is supported by Rudolph Marcus, who writes in his *Handbook of Ancient and Modern Mandaean* (Berlin 1965), p. 11 n. 5c, that Andreas' artificial etymology of Baathur is "patently Sophistic" (p. 147). Lefebvre, *ibid.*, p. XXIX, denies this. ZA 1916, p. 27, also refuted it. Pallis MS, pp. 1-4, is made still more improbable by the pronunciation of the name.

¹⁶ In fact, the Ugaritic word for "bull" is *thir*, which lacks a final vowel except as a case ending. This does imply that the name Abathur preserves an archaic Ugaritic form, but it does not preclude a potential transition from an older form which lacked a final aleph. Definite article "the one with" has been operated on.

¹⁷ Cf. A. Hirdner, *Corpus des tablettes en cuneiformes alphabétiques* (Paris 1963), 3:543.

the epithet *tōrā ʾl abuhā*. Other evidence for a correlation between Abathur and El as bull gods is found in a Mandaean text called the *Draṣan Abathur*. In a list of the seven secret names of Abathur, we find the name "Tauriel" or "Taurē" which literally means "Bull-El": "And Abathur putteth on its robes, he whose name is Kanbei, he whose name is Bhaq, he whose name is Hazazban, he whose name is Nsab, his name is Tauriel." (These are) the seven secret names of Abatur.¹

The same Mandaean text contains a story which explicitly links Abathur with a cosmic bull: "Then Abatur speaketh to Ptah, saying, 'Install thy son Adam there and go build a large building for him and settle him in it. And then bring the bull, Qadaet, tame him and fasten a yoke upon him and he shall plough furrows in the hills and we will sow seed so that the worlds and ages may eat thereof.'²

In addition to their common epithets, both Abathur and El are depicted as fathers of the lesser gods, reaching the demurge and as enthroned judges. Above we examined the Mandaean traditions which portrayed Abathur as the father of the demurge. Turning to El, we find a similar profile. In a number of passages, El is explicitly called *'abū ham ʾil* or "father of the gods".³ Just as Abathur creates Ptahil, who in turn creates the physical world, El fathers Baal who is the demurge proper in Canaanite mythology. The distinction between El as a god of theogony and Baal as a god of cosmogony is articulated clearly by Frank Cross in his book *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*: "El is creator, the ancient one whose extraordinary procreative powers have populated heaven and earth and there is little evidence that his vigor has flagged. Myths of 'El perceive creation as theogony. Myths of Baal view creation as cosmogony."⁴ As we have seen above, the same distinction between creation as theogony and creation as cosmogony may be applied to Abathur and Ptahil, respectively.

¹ Geo Widengren has already noted the parallel between Tauriel and El. Cf. Geo Widengren, "Die Mandäer," in Geo Widengren, ed. *Der Mandäismus*, Darmstadt, 1982, p. 74.

² E. S. Drower, *Draṣan Abatur*, p. 7. Cf. J. J. Backley, *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship*, p. 8, a being is called "Yawar Taurē" whose name is Jordan. Elsewhere Abathur is identified with the Jordan. Taurē is also mentioned in *ibid.*, p. 25.

³ *Draṣan Abatur*, p. 15.

⁴ *Corpus des tablettes en cuneiformes alphabétiques*, 32.1.25.33, etc.

⁵ Frank Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, p. 43.

Besides their common function as father of the gods, Abathur and El are both enthroned as judges. In numerous passages, Abathur is characterized as a judge:

Then Hibi Ziwa went and said to Abatur: Arise, set up thy throne in the House of Boundaries and take over sovereignty. And subjugate that which is sound good from that which is base when Man's measure is full and he is smitten and is baptized in the Jordan is weighed in thy Scales, is sealed with thy Seal, and riseth up and dwelleth in thy world.¹

Likewise, El is described as an enthroned judge:

El is enthroned with 'Attari <of the field>
'El sits as judge with Haddu his shepherd
Who sings and plays on the lyre.²

As Cross has noted: "The exercise of authority by 'El over his council suggests that his role is more that of a patriarch, or that of the judge in the council of a league of tribes than the role of a divine king. Similarly, Abathur is primarily characterized as a judge rather than a king, although Abathur may aspire to a royal function."³

Besides these linguistic and functional parallels, there is another association between Abathur and El which must be noted. Perhaps the most striking connection between the two figures is not a direct parallel, but a common one. More explicitly, a triangle may exist between the figures of El, the "Ancient of Days" in Daniel 7, and Abathur. Cross has already noted the parallel between El and the Ancient of Days or *atq yomin*.⁴ Both figures sit in judgement, and both are called by epithets which stress their agelessness. In Ugaritic sources, El is called both *mekk ozen*, "eternal king" and *malik abu shanma*, "king father of years."⁵ The similarity between these epithets and the name *atq yomin*, combined with the themes of enthronement and judgement, have led Cross to theorize that the author of Daniel 7 reauthorized ancient Canaanite motifs in order to create the figure of the Ancient of Days: "The text of Daniel 7 is of

¹ *Duran Abatur*, pp. 1-2.

² *Canaanite Myth*, p. 21, as quoted from the "Rephaim" cycle, *Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques*, 20-22.

³ In fact, in Abatur's Lament or Abathur's Klage, Abatur is sometimes called "King of the Shantas" although Abatur is described as unfairly usurping this position.

⁴ *Canaanite Myth*, p. 16.

⁵ *Ibid.* Cf. notes 23 and 24 for Ugaritic texts.

particular interest. The apocalypst utilized for his eschatological vision an old mythological theme: "El sitting in judgment in his court. The identity of the Ancient One is transparent."¹⁶

While the figure of El clearly influenced the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7, the exact relationship between the apocalyptic figure and Abathur is less obvious, although—as we have already seen, a number of striking parallels exist between the two figures. The important parallels between the Ancient of Days and Abathur are: 1. Abathur's enthronement as judge; 2. The epithet *atig* or "ancient" which is commonly attributed to Abathur; 3. The description of the thousands and myriads of angels who serve before Abathur.

The parallels between Abathur and the *atig yomin* may be explained by the direct influence of Daniel 7 on Mandaean theology, or by positing that both Daniel 7 and Mandaeism drew on common sources. In any case, we have seen other features linking Abathur and El which are independent of the common connection with the Ancient of Days from Daniel 7. As a number of scholars have noted, the revitalization of ancient mythological elements is a characteristic feature of apocalyptic writings in general, with the parallels between El and the Ancient of Days being only one example. The possibility that Mandaeism also produced a re-emergence of Canaanite mythological motifs, including those related to Abathur, is a topic which must be examined more closely, as must the links between Mandaeism and Jewish Apocalypticism. Thus, while it is possible that Abathur and the Ancient of Days are both influenced by the Canaanite deity El, it is unclear whether Abathur is also directly influenced by the figure of the Ancient of Days, or whether both figures incorporate common apocalyptic or pre-apocalyptic imagery.

Obviously, the view that Abathur's profile as enthroned judge depends, at least partially, on Canaanite and Jewish sources, runs contrary to the standard opinion of a Persian origin for Abathur. According to Kurt Rudolph, the figure of Abathur reflects two profiles: 1. Weigher and judge of souls; 2. Creative light-creature. These dimensions are combined in what Rudolph calls "ein typisch 'synkretistisches' Produkt der mandäischen Mythologie." Rudolph adds that Abathur's identity as weigher and judge of souls belongs

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 17.

This is the view of Frank Cross, Paul Hanson, and John Collins, among others.

¹⁷ Kurt Rudolph, *Theogonie, Kosmogonie und Anthropogenie*, p. 138.

to the oldest Iranian stratum of Mandaeism, while Abathur's function as Demiurge stems from the Jewish or 'semi-Jewish gnostic' World.¹⁷³⁵

In light of the striking parallels between the descriptions of Abathur El and the *atq romm* in Daniel 7.9-10, Rudolph's et al. conclusion concerning the Iranian origin of Abathur's identity as weigher and judge of souls may have to be amended. Either the Mandaeans had already created an Abathur-like figure before arriving in Babylonia and western Iran, basing it in part on Daniel 7.9-10 and/or other sources, or the figure of Abathur was originally based on a combination of Jewish and Iranian elements. In this scenario the Mandaeans or a group of proto-Mandaeans may have employed Canaanite and Jewish imagery as an original element in the creation of Abathur or in order to fill in the portrait of a pre-existing figure which the Mandaeans derived from Persian religion. The possibility that the Manichaeans employed Daniel 7.9-10 in either creating or, if he already existed in some form, portraying Abathur is strengthened by the fact that Daniel 7.9-10 is written in Aramaic, probably in an eastern dialect, which, in any case, would have been comprehensible to Mandaic speakers.

Besides these historical questions, there is a compelling phenomenological issue which must be addressed. Namely, what is the underlying significance of the adoption of El as a prototype or *forerunner* for the figure of Abathur? The solution to this problem lies in the distinction between Abathur and the Great Life. As we have already noted, the Great Life is the highest god in the Mandaean pantheon. A perfect being of light, the Great Life does not create (for this would compromise its perfection) but emanates. The first and second emanations of the Great Life are Yoshamin and Abathur respectively. Abathur compromises the unity of the Pleroma by gazing into the turbid waters of chaos, an act which produces the demiurge. For his impudence, Abathur is exiled from the Pleroma and enthroned at its entrance, a vantage point which allows him complete knowledge of the world and its inhabitants. In addition, Abathur takes on the capacity of weigher and judge of souls as well as leader of myriads of *uthras* or *ovine* beings. In Abathur's fallen incarnation, he is known as Abathur-Muzama or Abathur of the Scales. Yet, even after his exile, Abathur remains an

¹⁷³⁵ Ibid.

incarnation or *dmula* in the World of Light, who is called Abathur-Raina or Abathur the Exalted. Only in the eschaton will the two incarnations of Abathur be united, along with the rest of the Pleroma.

The figure of Abathur is a hybrid, composed, quite literally, of two distinct *untor*. On the one hand, Abathur is a creature of light, who dwells in the Pleroma, and on the other, he is a judge, enthroned outside (albeit, at the entrance) of the World of Light. As a being of light, Abathur is a dimmer reflection of the Great Life, since as the light is emanated, its quality decreases. It is well known that in Gnosticism, and as we have seen, in Mandaeism, a distinction is made between the highest god and the demiurge. Because in both Gnosticism and Mandaeism the highest god is a perfect being of light and therefore perfectly transcendent, the act of creating the demiurge must fall to an intermediary divine being who bridges the gap between the Pleroma and the physical cosmos. In Gnosticism, this divine being is a mother, Sophia. In Mandaeism, the creator of the demiurge is a father, Abathur, who is also enthroned as the judge of the world. Likewise, in Canaanite mythology, El is both the father of the demiurge and an enthroned judge. Thus, in El the Mandaeans found a ready-made prototype for a wisened god of judgement and father of the demiurge.

The revelation of Mandaeism was the creation of a perfect god whose transcendence precluded any contact with the physical world. Yet, at this phenomenological stage Mandaeism encountered two dilemmas: how was the world created and how is it judged. In order to solve these problems, Mandaeism revitalized the ancient mythological dynamic between a god of theogony/judge (El > Abathur) and a god of cosmogony/divine warrior²⁴ (Baal > Ptahil).

²⁴ Like Baal, who struggles with Mot and Yam before he creates the world, Ptahil must overcome the forces of chaos. If El was in fact a *lbnud*—the figure of Abraham—then depictions of Baal may have influenced the development of Abathur's son, Ptahil. Indeed, a long suggested etymology for the name Ptahil combines the verb *ptah*, which means to "open" or "create" in Mandaic and the word *el* or "god." Thus, the name Ptahil would mean "god creates," a reasonable derivation given Ptahil's role as the demiurge. If Ptahil's father were associated with a god whose proper name was El, however, then his name might have the significance "El creates," or "El creates or created [Ptahil]," with Ptahil, himself, functioning as the "son" of his own name, i. e. "El creates or created [Ptahil]." For a discussion of the various etymologies offered for the name Ptahil, see Kravang, *The Mandaean God Ptahil*. Kravang notes pp. 53-54 possible biblical parallels of the name Ptahil. 1 Chronicles 24:16, the name "Perthabiah" (*perthab yah*) and Joshua 19:14, the name of "Jptah-el."

As noted by Cross, the Hebrew god Yahweh represents the integration of the defining features of El the father of the gods and judge and Baal the divine warrior and demurge of the cosmos. In Abathur and Ptahil, we discover a Yahweh deconstructed, on a symbolic, if not a literal level.

While Yahweh is a synthesis of the dialectic between El and Baal, Abathur represents an incomplete synthesis of a new dialectic between El, or an El "like" god, and the Grrat Lale. Incomplete, because Abathur has a split-personality. Abathur Muzania and Abathur Rania. Abathur manifests ontological and functional features of both a transcendent being of light and an immanent creator and judge. In doing so, he bridges the physical and philosophical chasm between the Pleroma and the physical cosmos. It is quite likely that even if a figure such as El had not already existed to serve as a prototype, his characteristic features would have been invented in the figure of Abathur.

Other possible trajectories of the figure, or at least the name Abathur have been noted by Steve Wasserstrom, "The Missing Finger Writes: Mughurab Sa'id's *Maḥmūd*, *Ginnas* and the Mystery of Its Religion." On p. 9 Wasserstrom notes that the *uqab* = "knight" is either the Muslim rebel Mughura, or one of his followers, was "al-Abtar" ("the one with tail docked, the one cut off the childless." Wasserstrom writes that "None of the confining etymologies of the unknown, however is convincing. None of these Arabic etymologies naturally refers to the most likely source of the name, which was in fact a widespread, variously employed religious appellative. Among the various forms of the name and discussed by Wasserstrom is the Mandae name Abathur. Wasserstrom notes further, pp. 24-26, that the "anti-Messiah" or the Dajjal was also linked with the name "Abtar." It is interesting to note that one of the Arabic etymologies for al-Abtar, "the one cut off" is a highly appropriate appellation of the Mandaean Abathur, whereas another etymology, "the childless," directly conflicts with Abathur's image as the father of Ptahil.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

Despite their differences, the figures I have examined clearly reflect the same theological type: the angelic vice regent. The angelic vice regent is an ally or, more precisely, a servant of God. As such, he performs functions for a deity who is transcendent (Gnosticism/Mandaeism) or sometimes remote (Merkabah mysticism). Although the angelic vice regent serves God, his exalted nature is a potential source of tension between him and God. In the sources I have examined, this tension is expressed and, at least symbolically, resolved in a number of ways. Either the angelic vice regent is portrayed as a formerly rebellious figure (Sabaoth, Abathur) who has repented and been rehabilitated, or, as in the case of Metatron, the possibility that the angelic vice regent may be mistaken for a second god is expressly undermined.

Because he is God's servant, the angelic vice regent's relationship with God is not dualistic, despite the latent tension between them. Indeed, the angelic vice regent may even function as a remedy to radical dualism. This is clearly the case in Merkabah mysticism, where the positive characterization of Metatron as God's vice regent preempted or possibly served as an orthodox Jewish solution to nascent Gnostic views of an inferior and evil second deity. In Gnosticism and Mandaeism, the valorization of Sabaoth and Abathur as angelic vice regents may reflect an internal, theological reaction against an earlier stage of radical dualism.

As Gilles Quispel, Aar Segal, and others have argued, originally Jewish conceptions of an exalted angel appear to be the theological 'genotype' which later mutated into Gnostic depictions of the evil Demurge. Yet these same angelological conceptions also provided the raw material for the primary theological alternative to the evil second god, namely, the angelic vice regent. Thus Iadabaoth, Metatron, Abathur, and Sabaoth are all children of the same father. Indeed, the angelic vice regent and the evil inferior deity are essentially mirror images of one another. The mutability of the two types is illustrated in Valentinian sources, where the Gnostic Demurge himself is rehabilitated and thereafter functions as God's vice regent to a certain degree.

The angelic vice regent only achieves his exalted rank after he undergoes a process of angelification Metatron or rehabilitation Sabaoth, Abathur In other words, none of the figures we have examined is born an angelic vice regent Instead, each figure is chosen to undergo a profoundly transformative experience Therefore the tale of the angelic vice regent is an optimistic one It informs its readers that a fallen angel, like Abathur and Sabaoth, or a human being who belongs to a generation of sinners, like Enoch, can change for the better His lesson must have profoundly affected the world-view of those individuals who learned it Human existence was not hopeless If he accepted the unique authority of God, it was possible for even the lowest being to ascend the heights

What kind of individual would have identified most strongly with the angelic vice regent? In order to answer this question we must first address the more general issue of what kind of communities produced the figures we have been studying Drawing on the methodological model of Mary Douglas in *Natural Symbols* Alan Segal has reconstructed the social character of the Johannine community According to Douglas, there is a dynamic interplay between a group's social structure and its symbol system In Segal's words they are mutually dependent Sometimes social structure affects theology sometimes the opposite All we have to note is the frequent parallel relationship between a given social structure and a society's ideas of divinity

Douglas argues further that dualistic theologies, in particular, are produced by small competitive communities (who tend to believe themselves in a dangerous universe, threatened by sinister powers operated by fellow human beings) As Segal notes the imagined or real persecution of such groups may be projected into hostility on the part of cosmic powers²² Segal employs this model to explain the theological dualism of the Johannine community which stressed belief in Jesus while condemning traditional Jewish mediator figures and, in particular, the Prince of the World In Segal's view, the antagonism toward these cosmic powers both reflected and reinforced the antipathy felt by the Johannine community towards Judaism Thus in the minds of Johannine Christians there was a

Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*, New York, 1973, pp. 91-92, 145, 153, 199

²² "Ruler of This World," p. 251

Natural Symbols, p. 37

²³ "Ruler of This World," p. 251

symbolic connection between the oppressive Prince of the World and the oppressive Jewish community.

A number of other scholars have employed similar models to explain the relationship between social structure and theological symbols in other late antique religions. As we saw above, David Suter and George Nickelsburg have argued that the negative depiction of the fallen angels in *I Enoch 6-11* represents an attack on the Jerusalem priesthood. The authors of *I Enoch 6-11* may have considered themselves to be the rightful human priests. By attacking the fallen angels — Jerusalem priests, these pretenders created space for their own priestly aspirations. Once translated onto a cosmic plane the polemic against the Jerusalem priesthood gained added theological support.

The interplay between human and angelic priests also plays an important role in the Mandaean rehabilitation of fallen utras such as Yoshamin, Abathur, and Ptahil. According to Kurt Rudolph, at a certain point in the history of the Mandaean religion, the priestly class empowered itself and transformed what was originally a radically dualistic theology into a more monistic, ritualistic system in which human priests played a greater role. An important part of this social and theological transformation was the rehabilitation of fallen, cosmic priests such as Abathur, who were re-created in the image of the newly empowered human priests. Interestingly, a number of Mandaean legends depict violent conflict between the Mandaeans and the Jewish priesthood in Jerusalem. Indeed, in a story commonly called 'Ne-machadr-ezzar's Daughter' a group of Jewish rabbis and priests demand that the Mandaean priests reveal their secrets or they will kill them. This suggests that conflict over proper priesthood was an important element of inter-religious polemics as well part of the struggle over internal Jewish definition.

The issue of clerical authority was also an important element in the development of Gnostic theology. According to Elaine Pagels, the theological debate between Gnostics and orthodox Christians was essentially a struggle over what Pagels calls 'spiritual authority'.³ Both sides of this debate accepted the correlation between the structure of divine authority and the human authority in the church.⁴ When Gnostics deprecated the demarcic ruler of the

Elaine Pagels, "The Demarcic and His Archons' — A Gnostic View of the Bishop and Presbyters?" *Harvard Theological Review* 69 (1976) p. 303.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 320.

world, therefore they were implicitly undermining the authority of the orthodox Christian authorities. As Pagels writes: "The Valentinian gnostic admits that the bishop like the demiurge himself, exercises legitimate authority over the *psychic* church. But the bishop's demands, warnings, and threats, like those of the Demiurge himself, can no longer touch the one who has been redeemed."¹

It is important to note, however, that Pagels distinguishes between those Gnostics who depicted the Demiurge in unremittingly negative terms and those who basically rehabilitated him.

We might expect that those [Gnostics] who characterize the demiurge as irredeemably hostile, arrogant, and envious of the higher powers place themselves in a position of unremitting opposition to the authorities that bear the demiurge's name and claim to exercise his power. On the other hand, such groups as the Valentinians who characterize the demiurge as the instrument of the higher 'psychic' church, thereby indicate that they are willing to accept the structure of the orthodox church as a provisional one for psychics, if not for themselves.²

Pagels' distinction will play a significant role in my own speculation on the community which characterized Sabaoth as an angelic vice regent.

David Halperin has attempted to reconstruct the *Sitz im Leben* of the Hekhalot texts. Although developed independently, Halperin's interpretation is remarkably similar to Pagel's model (as he himself notes). According to Halperin, the authors of the Hekhalot literature were the *am ha'ares*, "people of the land." These common folk "had every reason to detest the rabbis" in Halperin's view.³ Yet, because the *am ha'ares* do not appear to have established their own religious institutions, their attitude towards the rabbis was highly ambivalent. On the one hand they thought of them as "arrogant tyrants, and on the other hand, they acknowledged them as "expert administrators" of the religious inheritance.

The result of this ambivalence was that the authors of the Hekhalot literature attacked the rabbis while pseudepigraphically invoking the authority of important rabbis and employing rabbinic traditions. The antipathy for the rabbis was projected onto the cosmic plane, where the tension between the rabbis and the *am*

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 314

² *Ibid.*, p. 321

³ *The Faces of the Chariot*, p. 442

⁴ *Ibid.*

ha'ares was reflected in the enmity between angels rabbis and humans *'am ha'ares*. Accordingly, human ascent to heaven encoded a rebellion against an oppressive rabbinic social structure as well as a threat to angelic authority. In another work, Halperin has extended his model to include the transformation of Enoch. According to Halperin, "we might imagine that the figure of Enoch bears the hopes of certain disaffected Jews who themselves hankered for the status of Temple priesthood. In their fantasy, the high and mighty sinners (the angels) are cast down from God's presence, while saintly humble folk (the human Enoch) are elevated to it."

Several scholars have criticized Halperin's model, including Elliot Wolfson.⁴⁹ According to Wolfson the link between apocalyptic and Hekhalot ascents makes an attribution of the latter material to the *am ha'ares* problematic, particularly since we know so little about this group. Secondly, as Scholem and Lieberman have already noted, the authors of the Hekhalot material were well versed in the intricacies of rabbinic law, as well as rabbinic aggadah. It seems unlikely that the *am ha'ares* would have possessed such knowledge. Finally, Wolfson points out that the medieval Ashkenazi transmitters of the Hekhalot literature would probably have avoided transmitting works which originated "in a fringe group, or worse, in a group that was the fierce opponent of the rabbis."

Despite its potential problems, Halperin's work provides a helpful segue into my own discussion of the type of community which characterized Metatron as an angelic vice-regent. Instead of the uneducated *am ha'ares*, however, I propose that the authors of the Hekhalot literature may have been an educated group of individuals who identified themselves with the priestly class. Unfortunately, it is difficult to determine the precise trajectory of the priestly circles within Judaism following the destruction of the Temple. What is certain, however, is that the authors of the Hekhalot material identified themselves with the priesthood, even if they were not actual physical descendants of priests.

Indeed, it is also possible, perhaps even likely, that any priestly authors of the Hekhalot literature were also rabbis. That is to say, they were involved in the creation and promulgation of aggadic and

⁴⁹ "Ascension or Invasion," p. 56.

See, for example, Peter Schäfer's critical comments on *The Hidden and Manifest God*, pp. 158-161. Elliot Wolfson, "Halperin: *The Faces of the Chariot*," *Jewish Quarterly Review* LXXXI, 1991, pp. 498-499.

halakhic traditions. This would explain the aggadic and halakhic expertise which the Hekhalot authors evince in their writings. In addition to the esoteric activities which they shared with their fellow rabbis, however, these priestly rabbis either inherited or revived an important part of the priestly e.g. in apocalyptic and Qumran circles patrimony: an interest in heavenly ascents and visionary experience.¹

The priestly authors of the Qumran literature attacked the legitimacy of the Jerusalem priesthood, instead emphasizing their own connection with the angelic priests. This paradigm was inherited by the Merkabah mystics who patterned their own priestly role and functions on those of their angelic counterpart Metatron. The interest of these priestly rabbis in mystical activities may have been opposed by more exoterically minded rabbis. Indeed, the Babylonian Talmud's version of Aher's encounter with Metatron may be evidence of this opposition.

Thus, Harper's view that depictions of angelic opposition to heavenly ascents in Hekhalot literature symbolize rabbinic opposition to the activities of the Hekhalot authors may be correct. Instead of reflecting a conflict between the rabbis and the *'am ha'ares*, however, the social tension may have existed between two classes of rabbis: 1. Esoterically minded rabbis who identified themselves as priests and wanted to continue the priestly traditions of heavenly ascent and visionary experience. 2. Exoterically minded rabbis who were opposed to this mystical activity.

1. Gruenwald, "The Impact of Priestly Traditions," pp. 75ff.

¹ For example, 1 Enoch 2 where Metatron describes himself as "of the family of Aaron" who "the Holy One blessed be He" chose to transmit "His presence and of whose head He chose" placed the priestly crown on Simon. Although there is a rabbinic tradition (BT Ket. 103b; BT Hull. 49a-c) that R. Ishmael was of priestly descent, he could not have been the "official" high priest in Jerusalem as implied by BT Ber. 7a since he was only a *hakam* when the Temple was destroyed. Cf. G. E. Murray Jones, *Transformational Mysticism*, pp. 20-1. When taking part in the celestial journey, the adept acts as the representative of the people before God, as well as being commissioned to declare what has been revealed to him. In other words, he performs a function analogous to that of the High Priest of the Temple. A passage (Synops. 2814-142) found in some versions of Hekhalot Rabban indicates that the adept, here typified by Metatron-as-Enoch, has taken over the priestly function of ascension. The high priestly function of Enoch in the heavenly Temple is asserted in *Jubilees* 1:25. For the explicit identification between Metatron as the heavenly High Priest and R. Ishmael as his earthly counterpart, cf. *2 Legends of the Masters*. "I have a servant *abad* on earth as you are my servant on high. His splendour corresponds to your splendour and his appearance corresponds to your appearance." *BT* vi 1:36. On his passage see Orlin, *arg. 1 Ench* p. 102 and Gruenwald, "The Impact of Priestly Traditions on the Creation of Merkabah Mysticism," p. 92.

The importance of Metatron to the authors of the Hekhalot material cannot be overestimated. With the earthly Temple in ruins, the focus of the Hekhalot authors was on the heavenly Temple. The ideal figure in the heavenly realm was Metatron, who functioned as the high priest in God's tabernacle. As such, Metatron was the angelic counterpart to the ideal Merkabah mystic, R. Ishmael, who was also depicted as a priest.

The characterization of Metatron as God's vice regent may reflect the desire of the priestly-rabbinic authors of the Hekhalot material for authority within the rabbinic establishment. At the very least, it indicates that the Hekhalot authors identified with the angelic vice regent and thought that they possessed a supra-angelic link or conduit to God, something which their opponents lacked. The typological association and identification between Metatron and the Merkabah mystics contrasts sharply with the antagonism between the demiurgic ruler of the world and the Gnostics, thereby illustrating the theological chasm between Merkabah mysticism and radical forms of Gnosticism.

Identifying the authors of the Hekhalot material as a circle of priestly rabbis rather than uneducated folk has many advantages. First of all, the authors appear to have considered themselves or, at least, their heroes to be priests. As such, they probably perceived themselves as continuing earlier priestly traditions of heavenly ascents and visionary experiences, which may help explain the connections between apocalyptic, Qumran, and Hekhalot material. The attribution of the Hekhalot material to a group of highly educated priestly rabbis also explains why the literature's authors were so well acquainted with halakhic procedures and why they identified so closely with Metatron, the heavenly high priest and his earthly counterpart R. Ishmael. My interpretation suggests an alternative to Halperin's view but it is just that — an interpretation. Like Michael Swartz, who has most recently speculated on the possible authors of the Hekhalot corpus — and rejected the *am ha'ares* hypothesis — I would argue that even if we cannot identify any single group with absolute certainty, we can at least point to possible social locations of the phenomenon.¹²

The attribution of the Hekhalot traditions concerning Metatron to priestly circles jibes with Rudolph's reconstruction of the social class

¹² Michael Swartz, *Scholastic Magic: Ritual and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, 1996), pp. 217–221. Swartz suggests other possible sources for the Hekhalot literature including groups active within the synagogue and scribes.

which created the literature on the Mandaean vice regent Abathur. In both cases, priestly authors created angelic vice regents to function as ideal prototypes for their own priestly aspirations. The transformation of Enoch into Metatron taught the Merkabah mystics that a righteous individual in a generation of sinners could be transformed into an angelic being, even an angelic high priest in the heavenly tabernacle. Likewise the rehabilitation of Abathur from a fallen *uthra* into a responsible celestial priest served as a model for the human priest who was ritually polluted and required purification and rehabilitation—a scenario which was quite common due to the stringency of Mandaean purity laws.

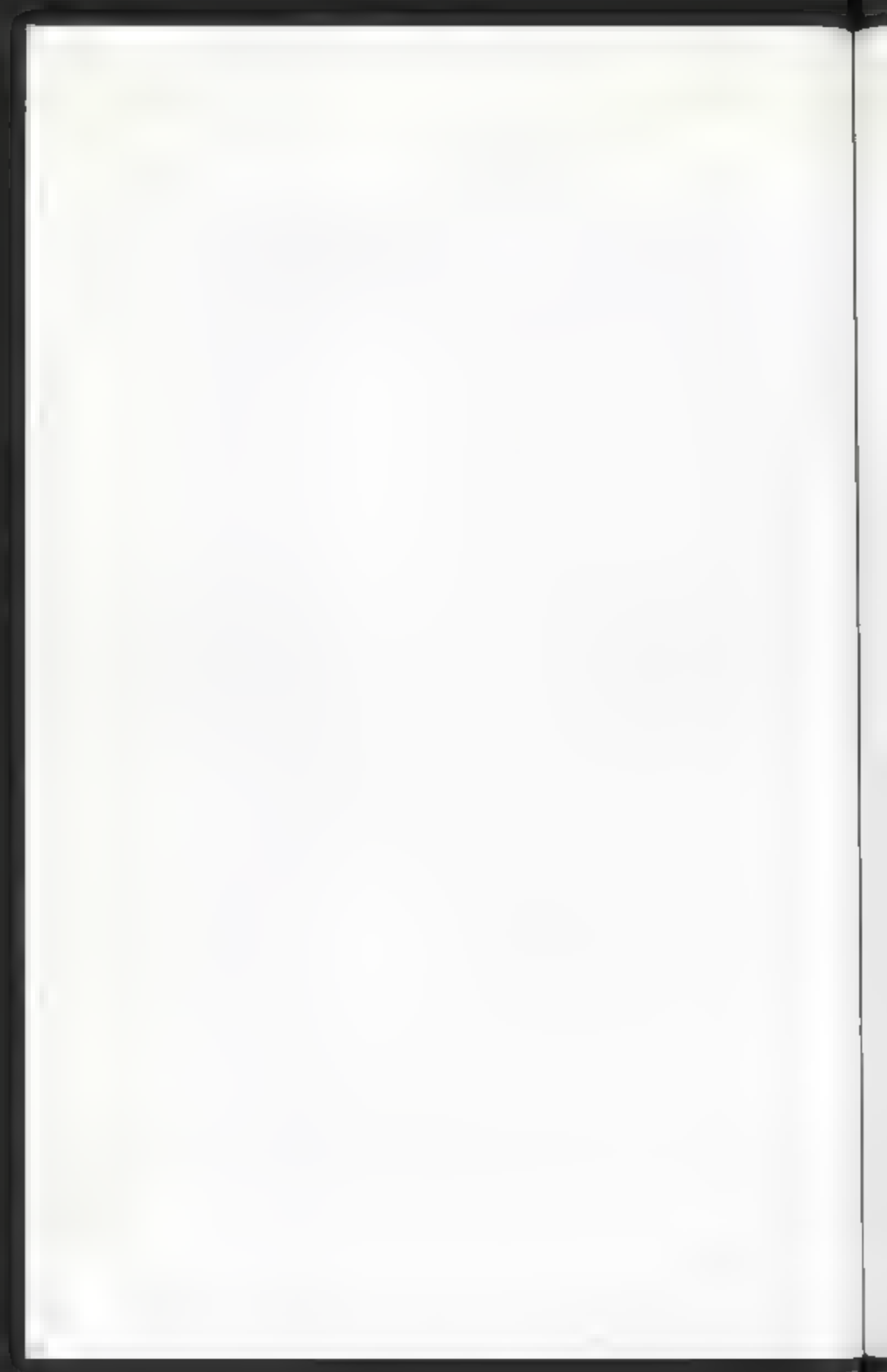
Although I have proposed plausible social contexts for the creation of Metatron and Abathur as angelic vice regents, the question of what kind of community characterized Sabaoth as an angelic vice regent still remains to be answered. Earlier I noted Pagels' distinction between those Gnostics who portrayed the demiurgic ruler of the world as entirely evil and those who characterized the demiurge as a repentant figure, who functions as "the instrument of the higher 'psychic church'". In Pagels' view, such Gnostics "thereby indicate that they are willing to accept the structure of the orthodox church as a provisional one for psychics, if not for themselves."

Pagels' observation is one of the keys to understanding the type of community which produced the speculation on Sabaoth. Like the Demiurge in Valentinian sources, Sabaoth is a repentant figure who is put in charge of the psychic church. However, while Sabaoth is rehabilitated, his father Ialdabaoth remains unrepentant. As I noted, this disjunction reflects a division of the biblical God into positive and negative dimensions. A division which Nils Dahl interprets sociologically: "One might guess that this differentiation corresponds to a distinction between the zealous opponents of the gnostics [symbolized by Ialdabaoth] and other Jews or, at a later stage, Christians for whom there was a hope of repentance [symbolized by Sabaoth]."¹⁶

By combining the observations of Pagels and Dahl, we may arrive at a picture of the group which produced the Sabaoth speculation. These Gnostics viewed Sabaoth as the ruler of the psychic church—that is, Christians and Jews who were not saved or damned by nature but could choose to accept the true God. As Pagels notes, such Gnostics may have even accepted the provisional authority of

¹⁶ Dahl, "The Arrogant Archon," p. 105 n. 36.

a repentant figure like Sabaoth, themselves. In either case, the authors of *HypArch* and *OnOrgWld* were less estranged from traditional Judaism and Christianity than their more radical cousins. Indeed, by creating the repentant and rehabilitated figure of Sabaoth, they may have hoped to inspire Jews and Christians to repent and accept the true God, themselves. If so, then Sabaoth, like Mexatron and Abathur, would have functioned as an ideal prototype for individuals who wanted to improve their lot in life or even to reach for the stars.



APPENDIX A

JESUS

This study has examined vice regent figures in late antique Judaism, Gnosticism, and Mandaeism. Absent from the body of this study, however, is an extremely important vice regent figure who appears in a number of related religious traditions. I am referring to the figure of Jesus, who functions as a vice regent in Christian, Gnostic, and Jewish Christian sources. The methodological reasons for omitting Jesus from my general discussion of vice regency are two-fold. First of all, the introduction of Jesus expands the comparative framework of this study tremendously. The web of relations between Christianity, Judaism, Gnosticism, Mandaeism, and Jewish Christianity are extremely complex — not to mention the apertal dynamics (i.e. in Johannine and Patristic writings, the Church Fathers, etc.) within Christianity itself. Providing a proper context for Jesus' role as an angelic vice regent would require an extensive examination of the links between Christianity, Judaism, et al. Secondly, the number of relevant sources for the depiction of Jesus as a vice regent is enormous in itself — as is the secondary literature on specific features of Jesus' vice regency such as his hypostatic character, his ascension and enthronement and so on. Therefore, a thorough treatment of this topic would require hundreds of pages or, in other words, a volume of its own.

Although I cannot provide a definitive examination of Jesus as a vice regent figure, it is nevertheless important to point out and briefly discuss the ways in which Jesus fills this role. It is important because depictions of Jesus inherit many of the same Jewish traditions which influence other late antique vice regents and because the portrait of Jesus which emerges from Christian, Gnostic, and Jewish Christian sources is remarkably similar to that of other angelic vice regents and, in particular, to that of Metatron. In the following pages, therefore, I will briefly survey the ways in which Jesus functions as a vice regent in these sources.

Early Christian texts avoid employing the term angel when depicting Jesus, in order to emphasize his superiority and lordship over the angelic beings (e. g. Heb. 1:2b-2:18).¹ In later Christian writings,

¹As noted by Alan Segal, *The Powers in Heaven*, p. 219 and *The Resen Christ*

however, the identification of Jesus as an angel is made explicit. For example, Justin Martyr depicts Jesus as God's messenger and chief angel, even identifying Jesus with the Angel of the Lord in Exodus 23:20.¹ Jewish angelological traditions also played an important role in Jewish-Christian depictions of Jesus as *Christos Angelos*.²

In addition to his identification with the Angel of the Lord, Jesus was linked with the "one like a son of man" of Daniel. In Matthew 25, Jesus is depicted as the enthroned Son of Man who will preside over the final judgement.³ The image of Jesus' exthronement at the right hand of God represents an exegetical transformation of Daniel 7:9-13 and Psalm 110:1. The Lord said to my lord, sit at my right hand.⁴ There is also evidence that Jesus, like the other angelic vice regents we have examined, was depicted in the image of the Ancient of Days of Daniel 7:9. As Christopher Rowland writes:

in Rev. 1:13-14 the description of the glorified Christ derives in part from the description of the angel who appears to Daniel in Dan. 10:5, but he is also given attributes of God himself derived from Dan. 7:9. Thus it would appear that the interest in God's glory on the throne of glory which plays a small but significant role in Ez. 1 and 1 Enoch 14 is now fulfilled, to some extent at least, by the reference to a glorious angelic being endowed with divine attributes.⁵

Gedaliahu Stroumsa has shown that Jesus — like Metatron — was

and the Angelic Mediator Figures in Light of Qumran," in *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. James Charlesworth (New York, 1992), p. 30.

¹ *Dialogue with Trypho* 7. See *Two Powers in Heaven* pp. 22-225. For further, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, pp. 148, 314.

² See, for example, Daniélou, "Trinité et angelologie dans la théologie judéo-chrétienne," *Recherches science religieuse* 45, 1957. For further, "Jewish-Christian Cosmology and Jewish Mysticism," *Journal of Theology* 37 (1934). Also see Henry Charles, *Temple and Contemplation*, London, 1966, p. 330, "primitive Judaeo-Christian Cosmology represents something like a middle way: the Cosmology of *Christos Angelos* and of the *Verus Prophetas*."

³ See also Mark 13:26-27 where Jesus as the Son of Man, passes judgment on Jerusalem. On the depiction of Jesus as the Son of Man, see J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination* pp. 209-214. See also *Two Powers in Heaven*, pp. 95, 205-209. For further, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, pp. 94-93. F. Borch, *The Son of Man in Myth and History*, Philadelphia, 1961, and *The Christian and Cosmic Son of Man*, London, 1970. M. Black, "The Son of Man Problem in Recent Research and Debate," *Bulletin of John Rylands Library* 4 (1963).

⁴ On the use of Ps. 110 in early Christianity, see David Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand: Ps. 110 in Early Christianity* SBL monograph 16, New York, 1973.

⁵ Christopher Rowland, "The Virgin's God in Apocalyptic Literature," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 17 (1986), p. 124 and "The Vision of the Risen Christ in Rev. 1:12-16: The End of Early Christianity as an Aspect of Jewish Angelology," *Journal of Theological Studies* 31 (1988).

depicted as both a youth *puer* and an old man *senex*, reflecting originally Jewish traditions which characterized God as a young warrior (Ex. 15:3) or lover (Song 5) and as an enthroned, elderly judge (Dan 7).⁷ According to Stroumsa, Jesus' polymorphous nature is also reflected in the primitive Christology of Phil. 2:6-11, where Jesus is described "in the form [*morphe*] of God and then in a servant's form, having become in a likeness of a man."⁸ A number of scholars have also linked Jesus' role as a High Priest with his image as the "servant" of God.⁹

The image of Jesus as priest is applied in a number of New Testament writings but only the Epistle to the Hebrews explicitly refers to Jesus as priest or high priest. The Epistle to the Hebrews teaches that Jesus is an enthroned high priest who serves in a heavenly sanctuary: "[Jesus] sat at the right of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, *alt. minister of the sanctuary and of the true tent*." (Heb. 8:1-2). The writings of the Church Fathers also describe Jesus as a High Priest. For example, Irenaeus writes that during baptism, Jesus clothed the human being in "his own priestly garment." "Jesus, the great High Priest of the Father, clothing us with His own garment . . . for those who are baptized in Christ have put on Christ" (Cm. 1:27). "has made us priests to God His Father. Apost. 1:10 as John declares" (*Monogamy* 7).¹⁰ Origen states that "the Son of God is the High Priest of our offerings and our advocate *parakletos* with the

7. Stroumsa, "Polymorphie divine et transmutations d'un mythologème," *Apocryphes de Jean et ses suites* (*Études Chrétiennes* 55), 38, also appears in Stroumsa, *Sagesse et autres traditions juives et chrétiennes d'origine amarienne* (Paris, 1992) and "Forms of God: Some Notes on Metemorphosis and Change," 381. In *Jesus et Jean*, p. 62, Stroumsa writes: "des points de vue d'origine mythologique sur la polymorphie divine, nous pouvons retrouver du Christ une image issue d'une des traditions esotériques juives sur la figure des Amari ou Amariques et de l'ancien des Jours dans l'âme."

⁸ *Jesus and God*, pp. 242-243 and "Polymorphie divine et transmutations," in *Savoir et Salut*, p. 62; Fossum, *The Name of Jesus and the Age of the Apostles*, 293.

⁹ See O. Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (Philadelphia, 1963), p. 83. Applied to Jesus the unique High Priest, Cullmann related "that of the Suffering Servant of God. In a certain sense one could actually understand it as a variant of the Suffering Servant concept. Although Leopold Sabatier, 'Jesus the High Priest,' in *Primordial and Comparative Study* (London, 1913), p. 204, criticizes Cullmann's formulation, he adds that "it shows that there are grounds for comparing the role of High Priest with that of Servant." See also James Schabert, "The Relationship between Priestly and Servant Messianism in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 30, 1968.

¹⁰ As cited in "Jesus the High Priest," p. 221. Compare this description with the Mandaean descriptions of Abathur clothing the soul in his seven garments. I discussed above.

Father, praying for those who pray and pleading with those who plead". (*Prayer* 101)

Christian depictions of Jesus as the enthroned Son of Man and the heavenly high priest are important elements in the tradition of Jesus' ascension and enthronement. As I noted above, the chief biblical proof-text for Jesus' ascension and translation was Ps. 110:1 ("The Lord said to my lord, sit at my right hand") where Jesus was identified with the second "lord" (*adonai*) of the verse.¹ Ephesians 1:19-21 represents one example of this exegetical tradition, in which God raises Jesus from the dead and installs him in heaven as his vice-regent:

They are measured by his strength and the might which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead, when he enthroned him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all government and authority, all power and dominion, and any title of sovereignty that can be named, not only in this age, but in the age to come.

Jarl Fossum has compared Christian traditions of Jesus' ascent and enthronement with *1 Enoch* 71, where Enoch is taken up to heaven and identified as the Son of Man, and with *3 Enoch*, where Enoch is translated to heaven and enthroned as Metatron. According to Fossum, "In the New Testament it is Jesus who is the one being translated to heaven, and both traditions used to describe Enoch's heavenly status recur in the picture of Jesus."²

Another important element in the traditions concerning Jesus' ascent and enthronement was his investiture with the Divine Name. Thus, Philippians 2:9-11 declares: "Therefore, God highly exalted him [Jesus], and gave him the Name above every name, in order

¹ Ibid., p. 222. I cannot agree, however, with Sakenah's interpretation of this passage. This passage is reminiscent of the description of Akatnei in BT Berakhot 7

For a discussion of Jesus' ascent and translation, see Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, p. 207ff. Also see the work of J. Davies, *He Ascended into Heaven: A Study in the History of Doctrine* (New York, 1938), pp. 15, 185 and Gerhardi Lohfink, *Die Himmelfahrt Jesu: Untersuchungen zu den himmelfahrt- und Erhöhungstexten bei Lukas* (Münster, 1971), p. 68-71 for the influence of Daniel 7:13 and the divine heptarchy on Jesus' transfiguration, particularly in Luke.

² See Segal's analysis of this passage in *Two Powers in Heaven*, p. 212.

³ *The Name of God and the Angel*, 1st ed., p. 24. See also the more reserved observation of Peter Hayman, "Monotheism: A Mixed Word in Jewish Sources," pp. 11-15. Whether or not the Jewish position is unambiguous, heaven and metamorphosis into Metatron was described with great difficulty because of the still unresolved problem of the date of the Similitudes of Enoch.

that, at the Name of Jesus, every knee should bend, in heaven and upon earth and under the earth"¹² The identification of Jesus with the Divine Name is developed more fully in Gnostic sources such as the *Gospel of Philip* 24 where the father gives his Name to the son: "For the son would not become father unless he wore the name of the father." And the *Gospel of Truth* 38 where Jesus is actually identified as he hypostasized Divine Name: "Now the name of the Father is the Son." Scholars have debated the origin of these Gnostic traditions, alternately emphasizing Jewish,¹³ Samaritan¹⁴ or Jewish Christian backgrounds.¹⁵

In addition to providing evidence that Jesus was linked with the Divine Name, Phil. 26-11 indicates that Jesus was identified as the hypostatic form of God in early Christology. As Strouthsa writes, "We may assume that according to this original conception when Christ was 'in the form [morphē] of God' [Phil. 26], his cosmic body filled the whole world."¹⁶ The conception of Jesus as God's hypostatic body also appears in the writings of the Church Fathers and in the writings of their competitors the Gnostics. In *Dialogue with Trypho* 128-129, Ius in Martyr refers to Christ as *Genos doxa Man' aner* and *Anthropos*, a series of associations which Gilles Quispel has linked with the hypostatic form in *Ezekiel* 1:26.¹⁷ Quispel has also identified a passage from the Gnostic *Tripartite Tractate* 66:10-16 which explicitly describes Christ as the form of the invisible God: "[Christ is] the man of the Father, that is the one whom I call the form of the formless, the body of the bodiless, the face of the invisible, the word of [the] unutterable."¹⁸

This passage not only depicts Christ as the hypostatic form or body but as the hypostatic face of God as well. A number of other Gnostic and Christian sources preserve the tradition of Jesus as the hypostatic face, including *Ecclesiastes* 10: 6-11, "God is above every thing; subordinated to Him is the Son, who is the face of

¹² See "Form(s) of God," p. 283; *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, p. 293.

¹³ Gilles Quispel, "The Jung Codex and Its Significance," in H. Ch. Puech, G. Quispel & W. G. van Unnik, *The Jung Codex*, trans. by F. Cross, London, 1955, p. 7; "Gnosticism and the New Testament," in *Gnostic Studies* I, Istanbul, 1974, p. 210.

¹⁴ "The Demurge in the Apocryphon of John," in *Nag Hammadi and Gnosticism*, ed. M. McL. Wilson, p. 175.

¹⁵ *Isisura*, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, pp. 106-112.

¹⁶ J. Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, London, 1964, p. 157.

¹⁷ "Form(s) of God," p. 283.

¹⁸ *Ezekiel*, 26 in *Jewish Mysticism and Gnosticism*, p. 2.

¹⁹ "Gnosticism and the New Testament," p. 10.

God," and the *Odes of Solomon* 13:2 "Behold the Lord is our mirror. Open your eyes and see them in Him. And learn the manner of your face." 2 Corinthians 4:6 identifies the divine Glory with the face of Christ: "[God] has let this light shine out of darkness into our hearts to give the light of knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."

In at least one passage the tradition of Christ as the hypostatic form of God was linked to his function as the creator of the world (Colossians 1:15-16 refers to Christ as the "image *eikon* of the invisible God," and adds that "it is in him that all things have been created . . . all has been created through him and for him").²⁰ Christ's demarcate function is also mentioned in John 1:3-10: "All things were made through him, and without him nothing that has been made was made . . . and the world was made by him"; Hebrews 1:10:

And you, Lord, laid the foundation of the world in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands," and a number of other New Testament passages.²¹ Jewish-Christian sources such as *Hom. 184* also depict Jesus as the creator of the world: "God gave to His Son, who is also called Lord, and who brought into being heaven and earth, the Hebrews as his portion, and appointed him to be god of gods, that is, of the gods who received the rest of the nations as their portions."²²

Jesus comes very close to matching the ideal profile of the angelic vice regent. He is variously portrayed as the chief angel, the heavenly high priest, the hypostatic form of God, the demarcate, and the enthroned judge of humankind. Scholars have noted the striking

²⁰ A. Segal, "The Risen Christ and the Angelic Mediator Figures," p. 315, has written: "Although Paul may be using language taken from his opponents in his apostolate, he is proclaiming that the face of Christ is the glory of God."

See "Form of God," p. 284.

²¹ See *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, pp. 95ff. Nils Dahl, "The Arrogant Archon and the Lewd Sophia," p. 699, is also for a list of New Testament verses which refer to Jesus' demarcate function: ideas "Christ, Creation, and the Church," in *Jesus in the Memory of the Early Church*, Minneapolis, 1976.

²² As noted in *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, p. 118. Concerning this language Fiskin writes: "Thus the Jewish Christians could in fact deny that the High Christ was the creator and accept the view that he created through his principal angel, the guardian angel of the Jews. This is no doubt a teaching of Jewish origin. The Jewish Christians identified the angel as Christ, the Son of God, while the Gnostics expanded the idea in another way and developed a dualism of opposition. On Jewish-Christian traditions concerning Jesus' demarcate role and his hypostatic function and the relationship of these traditions with the *Sefer ha-Rabbi*, see E. Wolfson, 'The Tree That Is All' Jewish-Christian Roots of a Kabbalistic Symbol in *Sefer ha-Rabbi* in *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 3, 199-213.

parallels between Jesus and other vice regent figures, including Moses,⁸ Metatron,⁹ and Sabaoth.¹⁰ The scholarly consensus concerning these parallels is that depictions of Jesus absorbed and transformed earlier Jewish traditions.

Although Christianity suppressed or even attacked the belief in traditional Jewish mediator figures, it would have been impossible for early Christians to accept Jesus as a second God, were it not for the precedent set by earlier Jewish angelic vice regent traditions.¹¹ In Christianity, therefore, Jesus successfully supplanted his supra-angelic predecessors but only by absorbing their features. At the same time that Christians were transferring features of Jewish angelic figures to Jesus, however, they were also suppressing the belief in these same figures within their own nascent communities. As Alan Segal has noted concerning the Johannine community: "The Johannine community seems to be aiming the class of mediators to a unique figure — Jesus".¹²

⁸ See Wayne Meeks, "The Divine Agent and His Counterfeit in Plato and the Fourth Gospel," in Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ed., *Aspects of Religious Propaganda in Judaism and Early Christianity*, Notre Dame and London, pp. 23-41.

⁹ See J. Maguire, *The Legends of the Jewish Son* (Philadelphia, 1948), 148-149; D. Neumaier, *Josephus' Prophecy of Joshua* (New York, 1972), 171-172; A. Margalit, "The Figure of Metatron: *Keter Le-tamut*," *Sefer Seder* 3, 1983, pp. 409-411; P. Hayman, "Monotheism: A Misused Word in Jewish Studies," pp. 14-15; G. Quispel, "The Deity of the Apocryphal John," in Y. Y. Lurie, ed., *The Angel and the Shofar and Yehoshua ben-Paḥia: Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 1, 1978, 1-18; E. E. Wilson, "The Tree That is All," in S. S. Schatzman, ed., *Symbolic Divine and "Forms of God"* (Evanston, 1970), 17-18; J. Maguire, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord* (see also W. Lurker, *Michael* (Göttingen, 1981) and J. Bachtel, *Christus Angelus: Die Anbetung von Christus in Kirche und Kulte in der griechisch- und christlichen Literatur des christlichen Altertums*, Bonn, 1942, on the influence of Michael speculation on depictions of Jesus).

⁹ See J. Maguire, *La naissance de Jésus-Christ: L'expansion de Sabaoth dans l'hypothèse des Actes 143, 1-11 et l'exposition de Jésus dans Philippiens 2, 6-11* (after du verbe éternel), *Revue de Théologie*, No. 83, Paris, 1973, who proposes that Phil. 2:6-11 and other New Testament passages which depict the exaltation of Christ have been influenced by the Sabaoth account in *NatArch*. Cf. however, Fallon's criticism of Maguire's position in *The Incarnation of Sabaoth* (J. B. Markman, ed., *Jesus Through Powers* (Berkeley in the Talmud and Incarnation) (Berkeley, 1978), 19-20, p. 151, has also noted a possible link between Jesus and Sabaoth in the Greek magical papyri, which invoke both Jesus the God for Hebrews and *Iao Sabaoth* without clearly distinguishing the two deities.

¹¹ This is the conclusion reached by Peter Hayman, as well. See "Monotheism: A Misused Word in Jewish Studies," p. 15. Under Christianized word, always unsuccessfully I think, to fit the Holy Spirit into the picture, it did not create as far as one might otherwise think from a well-established pattern in Judaism. Is there any other explanation for why thousands of Jews in the first century so easily saw Christianity as the fulfillment of Judaism and so easily accepted the believing in the deity of Jesus was perfectly consonant with their ancestral religion?

¹² *Ruler of This World: Attitudes about Mediator Figures*, p. 1-5.

In his analysis of Jili's doctrine of the 'Perfect Man,' Reynold Nicholson acknowledged the presence of Jewish and Gnostic elements, but he emphasized the influence of Christian ideas, such as the Trinity and the Holy Spirit on Jili's formulation. If Nicholson had been more aware of Jewish Merkabah traditions, however, he could have noted a number of striking parallels between Jili's Perfect Man and the Jewish figure of Metatron. Indeed, the Perfect Man of Jili's *al-Insanu'l-kamil* appears, in many ways, to be a transformation of earlier Jewish conceptions of the angelic vice-regent.

According to Jili the Perfect Man is "our Lord Mohammed" and "stands over against the Creator *al-Haqq* and the creatures *al-khalq*." That is, he is an intermediary between God and His creation.¹ In the sixtieth chapter of *al-Insanu'l-kamil*, Jili describes the Perfect Man (i.e. Mohammed) as follows:

The Perfect man is the *Qutb* (axis) on which the spheres of existence revolve from first to last, and since things came into being he is one *nashid*² for ever and ever. He hath various guises and appears in diverse bodily tabernacles (*kamalat*) in respect of some of these his name is given to him, what in respect of others it is not given — but His own original name is Mohammed, his name of honor — *Abu'l-Qasim*, his description — *Abu'llah*. You must know that the Perfect Man is a copy *nashid* of God, according to the saying of the Prophet: "God created Adam in the image of the Merciful," and in another *hadith* "God created Adam in His own image." Further, you must know that the essential names and the Divine attributes belong to the Perfect Man by fundamental and sovereign right in virtue of a necessity inherent in his essence.

The parallels between Jili's depiction of the Perfect Man and Jewish conceptions of Metatron are both numerous and striking. Like Metatron in Kabbalistic sources, the Perfect Man is portrayed as the pole or axis *Qutb* of the universe. He appears in different guises and 'bodily tabernacles,' much like Metatron sometimes resembles an old man, and sometimes a youth. The Perfect Man is described as "Abdullah" or "the servant of God," just as Metatron is called God's *ebed* "servant." While Metatron is identified with the *Ma'ar Qamuh* or hypostatic divine form, Jili calls the Perfect Man a "copy *nashid*" of Allah, and elsewhere, he refers to the hypostatic form of Mohammed³ as *suratu'l-Muhammadiyah*.⁴ The Perfect Man also pos-

¹ See *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 138ff.

² *Ibid.*, p. 104.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 105-106.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

sesses "the Essential Names." Just as Metatron is called by the name of God, and possesses seventy other exalted names. Finally, the Perfect Man is identified with Islam's chief prophet Mohammed, while Metatron is intimately linked (although not explicitly identified) with Moses.

Besides the Perfect Man himself there is another intermediary being described by Jili in *al-Insanu'l-kamil* who exhibits parallels with Metatron and the other angelic vice regent figures we have examined. According to Jili the *Ruh* or "Spirit" is a supra-angelic being, who though not identical with the Perfect Man, is identified as "The Spirit of Mohammed."

God created the angel named *Ruh* from His own light, and from him He created the world and made him His organ of vision in the world. One of his names is the Word of Allah *Amr Allah*. He is the noblest and most exalted of existent beings; there is no angel above him and he is the chief of the Cherubim. God raised the millstone of existent beings to turn on him and made him the axis *quṭb* of the sphere of created things. Towards every thing that God created he has a special aspect *ṣiḡḡ* in virtue of which he regards it and perceives it in its appointed place in the order of existence. He has eight forms which are the bearers of the Divine Throne *al-Arsh*. From him were created all the angels both the sublime and the elemental. The *Ruh* exercises a Divine guardianship over him by God, over the whole universe.... He is the first to receive the Divine command which he then delivers to the angels and when ever a command is to be executed in the universe, God creates from him an angel suitable to that command, and the *Ruh* sends him to carry it out. All the Cherubim are created from him e.g. Seraphiel, Gabriel, Michael, and Azrael. The *Ruh* has many names according to the number of his aspects. He is named: The Most Exalted Per, and The Spirit of Mohammed, and The First Intelligence, and The Divine Spirit, on the principle of naming the original by the derivative. But in the presence of God he has only one name which is "The Spirit" *(al-Ruh)*.

The *Ruh* or "Spirit" is depicted as the means by which the world was created, much as Metatron is portrayed in kabbalistic sources. Like Metatron, who is identified with the "Special Cherub" *kerub ha-meyushaf* and is the leader "over the majestic cherubim," the *Ruh* is depicted as the chief of the Cherubim who, according to Jili, possess Jewish angelic names, such as Seraphiel, Gabriel, and Michael.⁴ Furthermore, the *Ruh* has eight forms which support the Divine

⁴ Ibid., pp. 110-112.

⁵ *Enoch* 48c.

Throne, a motif which echoes the Merkabah and Gnostic traditions of the eight archangelic or cherubic forms.⁹ In the Gnostic text *On the Origin of the World* 104-105, Sabaoth creates a throne-chariot called "Cherubin" which has eight "shapes" per corner, and seven archangelic beings to minister before it, while Sabaoth himself, is counted as the eighth.

And before his mansion he created a throne, which was huge and was upon a four-faced chariot called Cherubin. Now the Cherubin was eight shapes per each of the four corners, lion forms and all forms and Pagan forms and eagle forms, so that all the forms amount to sixty-four forms and he created seven archangels that stand before it, he is the eighth and has authority. All the forms amount to seventy-two. Furthermore from this chariot the seventy-two gods took shape, they took shape so that they might rule over the seventy-two languages of the peoples.

Just as Metatron is commonly called the *sar ha-panim* or "Prince of the Countenance," and is identified with the hypostatic face of God, so the *Ruh* is depicted as possessing a special aspect [i.e. "face"], directed "towards every thing that God creates."¹⁰ Finally, the *Ruh* "exercises a Divine guardianship, created in him by God, over the whole universe." He is the first to receive the Divine command, which he then delivers to the angels; and whenever a command is to be executed in the universe, God creates from him an angel suitable to that command, and the *Ruh* sends him to carry it out.¹¹ Likewise, in *1 Enoch* 48, Metatron is described as follows:

I made every prince stand before him to receive authority from him and to do my will. I took seventy of my names and added them to him, so as to increase his honor. I gave seventy princes into his hand, to issue to them my commandments in every language, as it is written: "So the word that goes from my mouth does not return empty; he carries out my will." [Isa. 55:1] It does not say here: "I carry out," but "he carries out," which teaches us that Metatron

⁹ For Jewish and Gnostic traditions of the eight forms, cf. Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 122-128 and "The World of Angels in Homan Form," pp. 25-26, n. 90. On the specific motif of the eight throne-bearers in Muslim sources, see Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, pp. 469-473. The Koran itself lists the number of angelic throne-bearers as eight: "And the angels will be on the sides thereof, and eight will uphold the Throne of thy Lord, *raḥimūn aḥsh rabbūna* that day, above them" (Surah 69:17).

¹⁰ The Arabic term *waḥḥ* can signify "aspect" or "face," as in the Koran 2:109: "Wherever you turn, there is the face [waḥḥ] of Allah." On Islamic traditions of the hypostatic face, see Henry Corbin, *Face de Dieu, face de l'homme: herméneutique et mystique* (Paris, 1983), pp. 237-310. These traditions echo earlier Jewish sources.

stands and carries out every word and utterance that issues from the mouth of the Holy One blessed be he and executes the decree of the Holy One

Although I have only touched the surface of *al Insanu l kamul*, the many parallels between the intermediate divine beings described by Jm and the angelic vice regent Metatron hint at a thematic matrix shared by Jewish and Muslim sources. My comparative study confirms the work of Steven Wasserstrom, who refers to a "Jewish-Muslim syncretism." Between Muslim and Jew, angels and origins were traded in the marketplace. Indeed, Wasserstrom has illuminated a kind of parallel life for Metatron in Muslim sources, even discussing a Shi'i amulet published in Pakistan in 1973 which invokes the aid of Metatron.³

Many Muslim magical traditions closely resemble the Jewish traditions I have examined above, including the classical depiction of Metatron as the guardian of the curtain before God. Some appear to add new elements to the Metatron myth, although even here Jewish sources may reveal parallels. A talisman entitled *kitab 'azm fi 'ilm al hikma wa ma yatawataba alahi* "The Great Book Concerning the Knowledge of Wisdom and What Denives Therefrom" describes Metatron as holding a whip of seventy-three lashes: "While I do not know of any Jewish sources which depict Metatron as holding a whip, this tradition may have some connection to the Hekhalot passages §672 and 3 Enoch 16, two versions of the Aher/Metatron tradition. In §672 Metatron is punished as follows: "Immediately they brought out Metatron to outside the Curtain, Pargod, and struck him with sixty fiery lashes." Although Metatron does not possess a whip himself, he is linked to the act of whipping. Even more suggestive is the version in 3 Enoch: "In the same moment, Anafic, YHWH, the glorified, splendid, endeared, wonderful, terrific, and dreadful Prince came at the dispatch of the Holy One blessed be he and struck me [Metatron] sixty lashes of light and stood me on my feet."

³ Enoch 48c, as cited in Alexander, "The Hebrew Apocalypse of Enoch," p. 352.

⁴ Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, p. 205.

⁵ Ibid., p. 199.

⁶ Edgar Blochet, "Études sur le gnosticisme musulmane" *Revue de l'orientalisme* 3 (1909), p. 293. Concerning this study on Wasserstrom, p. cit. p. 190 n. 40 writes, "Although I have not found this particular motif in Jewish texts, it is sufficient to read 3 Enoch (*Seder Hekhalot*) to see the striking aspect of Metatron in his Merkavah depiction, which may perhaps [sic] have some bearing on this whip-wielding Metatron."

Here Metatron testifies that a supra-angelic being named 'Anafiel YHWH whipped him with sixty lashes. It is easy to imagine how this tradition could have been transformed to produce the Muslim depiction of Metatron, rather than 'Anafiel, holding a whip

APPENDIX C

HERMES

In an earlier chapter I compared the angelic vice regent and the trickster as phenomenologically distinct but in many ways, similar mythological types. Among the tricksters I discussed was Hermes, whose career begins in Greek mythology and passes through a remarkable number of literary incarnations in a variety of languages. In this appendix, I will argue that depictions of Hermes have so much in common with those of angelic vice regents like Metatron, Sabaoth, and Abathur, that Hermes appears to straddle the boundary between the two types of mythological figures.

In his study on Hermes as trickster, William Doty characterizes Hermes as an example of "the Greek sense of a divine-human continuum," which he contrasts with the "sharp differentiation between the divine and human that was developed in Judaism and Christianity." As we have seen, Doty's model is explicitly related by angelic vice regent figures in both Jewish and Christian sources, who blur the boundary between human and divine modes of being.

Perhaps the most important parallel between Hermes and the angelic vice regent figure is that both embody the logic of mediation. Indeed, St. Augustine even derived the name Mercurius, the Roman version of Hermes, from his role as mediator or "medius cunctis, walking in the middle of two opposing individuals or "quod sermo currat inter homines medius." Another striking parallel between the figures is their ambiguous and polymorphous character. Hermes, like Metatron and Jesus, was depicted as an old man (*sphenopagon*) and a youth (*ekhnou*).¹ The Book of Krates, one of the Arabic Hermetic writings, actually draws on the image of the Ancient of Days of Daniel 7⁹ in its depiction of Hermes. Upon ascending to heaven, Krates sees the following:

¹ Including Greek, Latin, and Arabic.

William Doty, "A Lifetime of Trouble-Making: Hermes as Trickster" in *Mythical Trickster Figures*, p. 50.

Cf. *Det. VO* 14. See Gerard Mussies, "The Interpretatio Judaica of Thot-Hermes," in M. Heerma van Voss, E. J. Sharpe, and R. J. Z. Werblowsky, eds., *Studies in the History of Religions XLIII*, Leiden, 1982, p. 115.

² "A Lifetime of Trouble-Making," p. 48.

A survey of the Hermetic writings in Arabic is given by L. Masson in A. J.

And behold, an old man the most beautiful of men sitting in a throne-stool and wearing white garments, in his hand a shining tablet, containing a writing.... And I inquired about the old man and it was said to me: this is Hermes Trismegistos.¹

This passage is extremely significant for it reveals that Hermes, like Metatron, Abathur, and Sabaoth, belonged to a trans-cultural, but originally Jewish exegetical tradition which transferred the depiction of the *atig yomim* to a lower divine or angelic being.

Like Abathur, Hermes was identified with the phallus, and his chief symbol was a phallus erected on a *herma* or phallic pillar. Hermes was also intimately linked with the care of human souls. Among the different functions Hermes possessed were caretaker of souls during sleep, weigher of souls of the dead on a scale (*psychostasy*), leader of souls (*psychopomp*), on their way to Hades, and soul raiser (*psychagogos*) who led souls into this world, either for a brief visit or a new bodily incarnation.² In addition to these responsibilities, Hermes also played an important magical role: the term is derived from *maia*, 'midwife' or 'nurse,' personified by Hermes (mother Maia) and was even called a male midwife.

As we saw above, both Metatron and Abathur were associated with the passage of souls into the divine world, during life and after death, respectively, while Abathur and perhaps Metatron, were linked with the weighing of the souls. Although neither Abathur nor Metatron was depicted as a midwife or nurse, per se, Metatron was characterized as the teacher of all the souls of the dead that have died in their mothers' wombs, and of the babies that have died at their mothers' breasts, and of the schoolchildren that have died while studying the five books of the Torah.³ While Abathur's water house was described as the storage place for the pre-existent souls that have not yet descended to earth.⁴

Benasagiere: *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste* (Hermetisme et Astrologie), Paris, 1959, pp. 384-400.

¹ Translation from Geo Widengren: *Hermetism: Gnostic Literature in the Aramaic Language*, in *The Ascension of the Spirits and the Heavenly Host*, p. 8. On the appearance of Hermes, Widengren writes, "For the old man, dressed in white and sitting on the throne, we may compare the description of the God in Dan. 7:9."

² A Lacertine of Trouble Making, p. 48 and *Exodus One of The World Otherworldly Journeys from Langenscheid to Albert Einstein*, Boston & London, 1980, p. 20.

³ *One of The World*, p. 20. On these notions see also P. Ravaillac: *Hermès Psychagogue: Essai sur les origines du culte d'Hermès*, Paris, 1935.

⁴ 3 Enoch 48C.

⁵ See Ginz, pp. 207-210.

According to Cyril, bishop of Alexandria 412-444, Hermes Trismegistus 'Thrice Great' was a priest. Other important functions attributed to Hermes included those of divine scribe and messenger. In fact, the identification of Hermes as heavenly scribe is preserved in the Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 156a: "He who is born under Mercury will be of a retentive memory because he [Mercury] is the scribe of the sun." As we have seen, the role of priest was attributed to Metatron, Abathur, and Jesus, while Metatron was characterized as God's messenger and scribe.

Because of his multivalent character, Hermes was easily equated with important figures from a variety of religious traditions. This process of identification, commonly known as *interpretatio* following Tacitus, *On the Origin and Situation of the Germans* ch. 48, was extremely popular in Late Antiquity. As Gerard Mussies has emphasized, however, the basis for equating two figures in late antique sources was never absolute similarity, but "partial analogies."² This is precisely the situation in regard to Hermes and his counterparts. In Egypt, Hermes was equated with the god Thoth, who functioned as the divine scribe and messenger in Egyptian religion. Within the Christian tradition, Hermes was identified with a number of figures. For example, Justin Martyr compared Hermes with the Logos Christ (1 *Apol.* XXII2), while Conrad Celtes equated Hermes with John the Baptist in a wood-cut made for Petrus Irtenius' *Melopoeia*, an early sixteenth century songbook.³ Although Mandaean sources themselves do not identify Hermes with any Mandaean mythological figures, E. S. Drower noted the similarity between the Primal Adam and Hermetic depictions of Hermes and even argued that "The Hermetic writings have so much which corresponds closely to religious conceptions familiar to them in Nasiraeen gnosticism that they [Mandaeans] would readily have identified the Hermes of the *Panandria* as their own Manda-d-Hua or Mara-d-Rahatha."⁴

Hermes was also identified with several figures from the Jewish tradition. Of course the best known case is Ariapanus' *interpretatio* of

² In Cyril's *Against the Writers of Julian the Athlete*, cf. Gerard Mussies, "The *Interpretatio Judaica* of Thot-Hermes," p. 94.

³ On Metatron as messenger, see J. T. Milik, *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumrân Cave 4*, pp. 131ff.

⁴ Mussies, "The *Interpretatio Judaica* of Thot-Hermes," p. 103.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 118-120.

⁶ *The Secret Adam*, p. 22, n. 1, p. 112. Although *The Hymn of the Gnostic* may identify Mercury and Jesus.

Hermes as Moses.¹⁶ In Arabic Hermetic sources, Hermes was also equated with the figure of Enoch (e. g. 'Idris).¹⁷ Finally, in the Aramaic incantation bowls, Hermes was actually equated with the angelic vice regent Metatron.

Blessed art thou, Yahweh, on account of thy Name in thy name,
thou whose name is Yōfi'el, and Yehi el they call thee, whose names
are Sangi'el, Yawheh, Yawē (?), Yhi [] and Hermes Metatron Yah.¹⁸

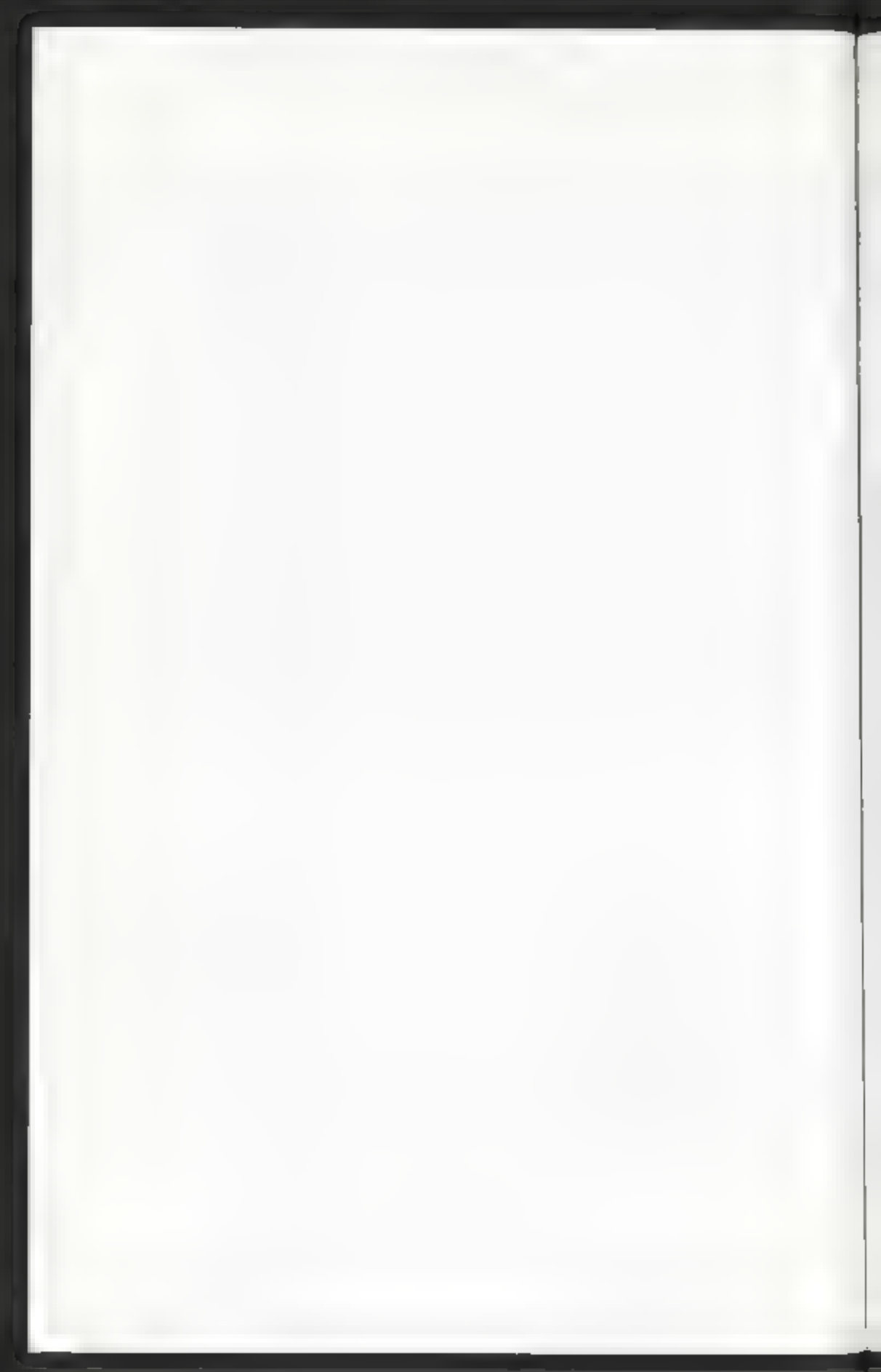
The connection between Hermes and Metatron survived in Muslim sources. Indeed, in his survey of Muslim charms and amulets, Baron Carra de Vaux noted that "Metatron is assigned sometimes to Jupiter and sometimes to Mercury."¹⁹

¹⁶ Arthur Droge, *Homer or Moses? Early Christian Interpretations of the History of Culture*, Tübingen, 1989, pp. 25-35, discusses Artapanus' writing on Hermes and Moses.

¹⁷ See Tamara Green, *The City of the Moon God: Religious Traditions of Harran*, Leiden, 1992.

¹⁸ A. Montgomery, *Iranian Incantation Texts from Nippur*, Philadelphia, 1933, pp. 207-208, no. 1, CBS 50093 and pl. XXV. Translating as *Yah Misk*, *The Book of Enoch*, p. 128. Unfortunately, on the basis of the Arabic Hermetic identification of Enoch-Hermes and the incantation bowl identification of Metatron-Hermes, Misk arrives at the unfounded conclusion that the author or redactor of *1 Enoch* must have combined both of these traditions, thereby equating Enoch with Metatron. This position, which forms part of Misk's late dating of *1 Enoch*, is refuted by P. S. Alexander, "The Hebrew Apocryph of Enoch," pp. 227-229.

¹⁹ Baron Carra de Vaux, "Charms and Amulets: Muhammadan," *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* 3, pp. 257-261.



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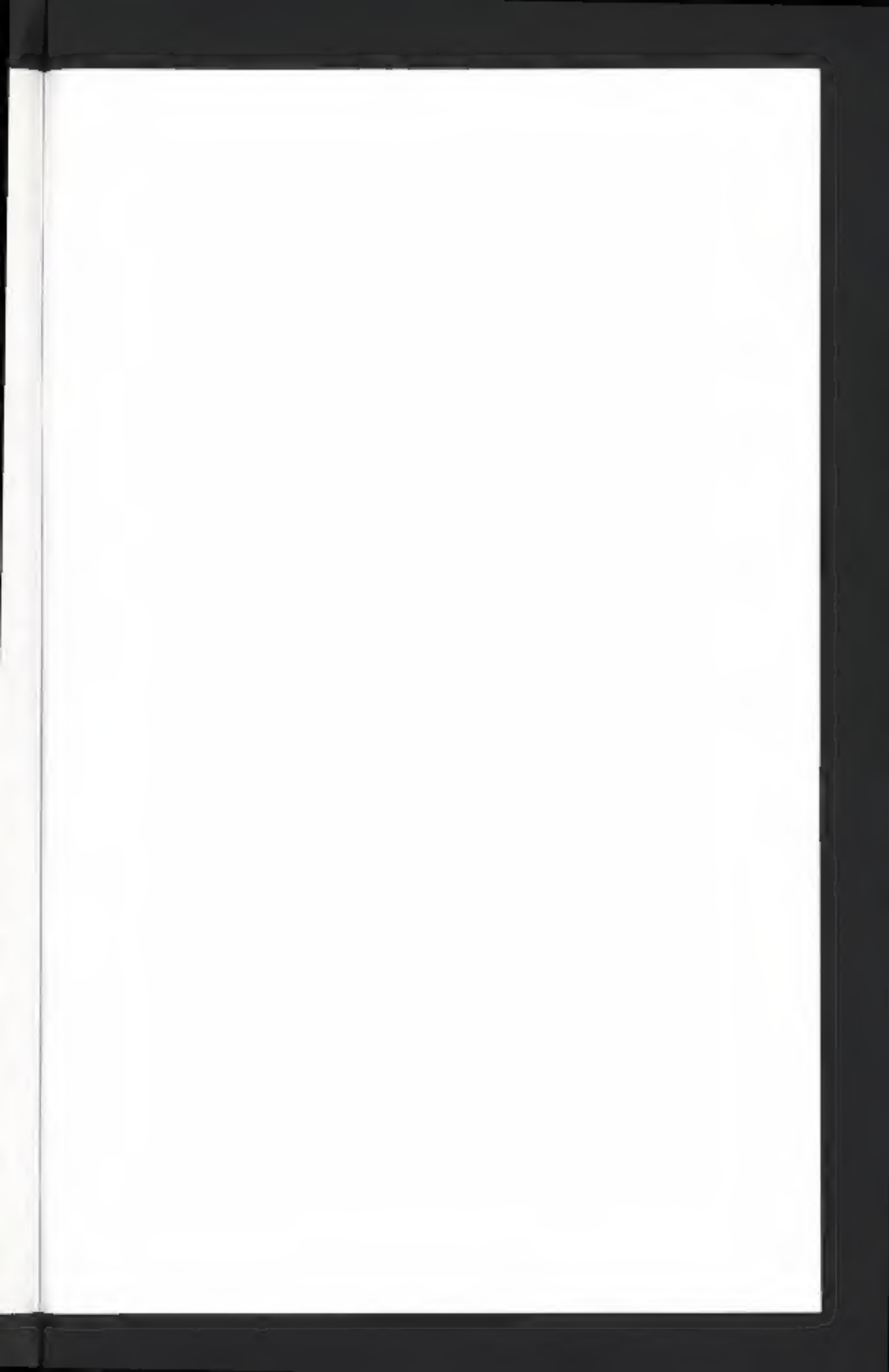












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